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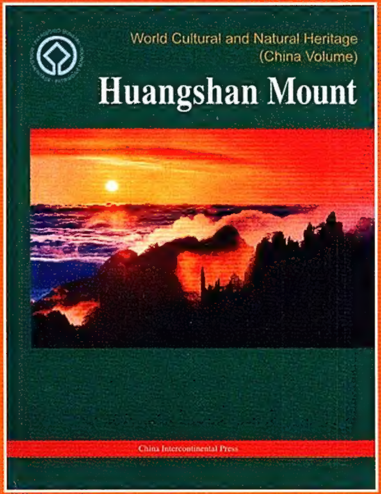
Mt. Huangshan, situated in the south of Anhui Province, is one of the most famous scenic areas in China. Being put into the World Heritage List, it is also granted with two laurels of cultural heritage and natural heritage by the UNESCO's World Heritage Commission.

The landscape of the mountain is a typical granite hoodoo landform shaped during the long geological periods by several tectonic movements in the crust. Mt. Huangshan has long been famous for its strange-looking pine trees, grotesque rocks, sea of clouds and hot springs.

All over one thousand metres above sea level, there are 77 peaks in the scenic area of almost two hundred square kilometres. Granite rock forests and rock columns together with massive rocks scatter everywhere. Moreover, Mt. Huangshan is a diverse ecosystem with a treasure of wildlife. There are approximately 1450 species of plants, 300 species of vertebrates and 170 species of birds.

Combined unique scenery and magnificent sea of clouds, the beauty of Mt. Huangshan has continued to fascinate endless visitors. Catch a glimpse of its glory in this "Huangshan Mount" pictorial that is filled with breath-taking images taken by our team of photographers!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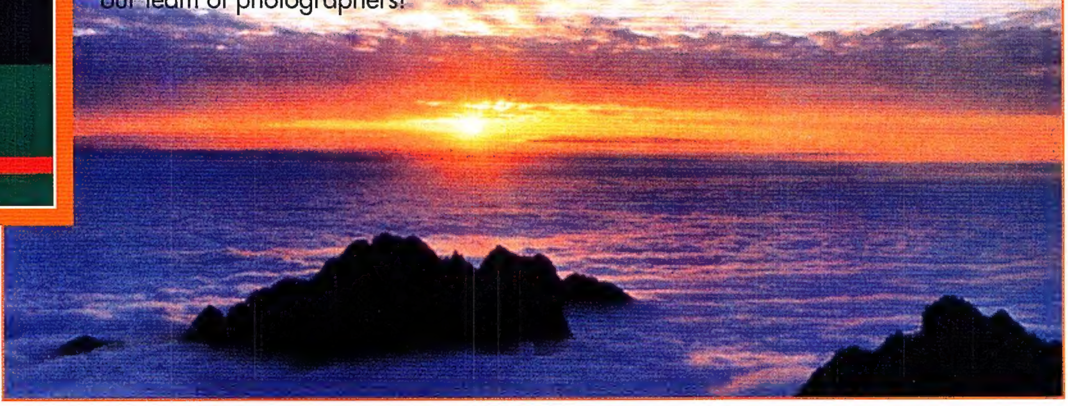

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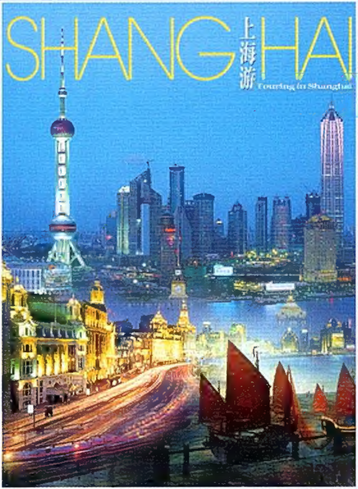
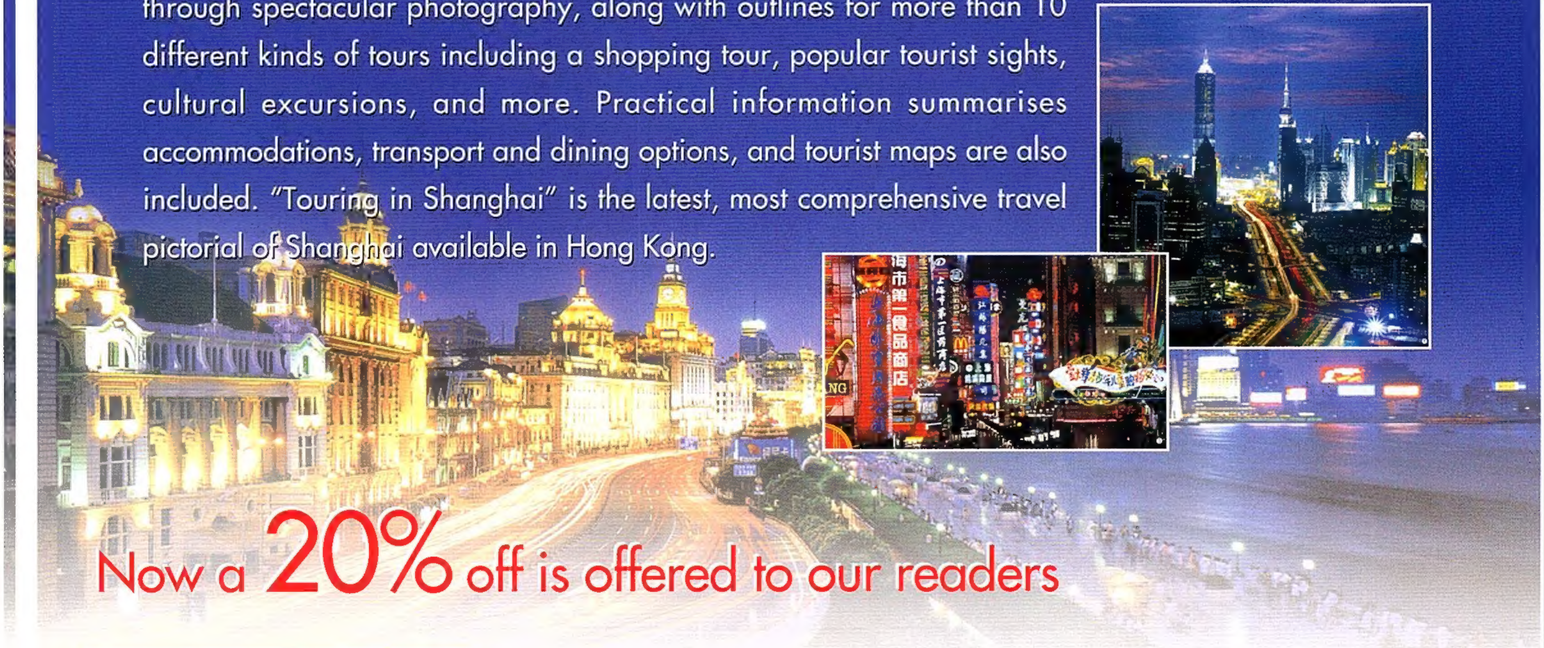


Shanghai has evolved at an unprecedented speed for decades into the biggest commercial city in China and one of the great metropolises of the world. Favourably located at the mouth of the Yangtse River, Shanghai has a long history and a rich culture. Commercial tower blocks and traditional buildings exude their individual charms simultaneously in the Pudong District, where hundreds of buildings in different styles, old or new, are collectively known as the Exposition of World Architecture. A kaleidoscope of entertainments and festivals of Old Shanghai attracts scores of entrepreneurs and travellers alike. "Touring in Shanghai" takes you deeper into this vibrant city through spectacular photography, along with outlines for more than 10 different kinds of tours including a shopping tour, popular tourist sights, cultural excursions, and more. Practical information summarises accommodations, transport and dining options, and tourist maps are also included. "Touring in Shanghai" is the latest, most comprehensive travel pictorial of Shanghai available in Hong Kong.



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Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

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Flying Like Apsaras in the Sky of Dunhuang

Photos by Wang Jin *Article by Wang Jin and Zhang Liping*

I was flying among the clouds and look down on Dunhuang from the air, like the Apsaras. It was an unforgettable experience.

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Photos by Ou Yansheng *Article by Pu Yi*

The fishing families of Erhai Lake lived there for generations, and they are as intimate with the lake as the ospreys.

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Valley Deep, Mountain High — In Search of Takins

Photos by Liang Qihui *Article by Hu Jun and Qihui*

The takin is a Class A protected animal in China. Heavily built yet nimble and quick, the animal appears like a cross between a goat and an ox, and lives at altitude of up to 3,000 m.

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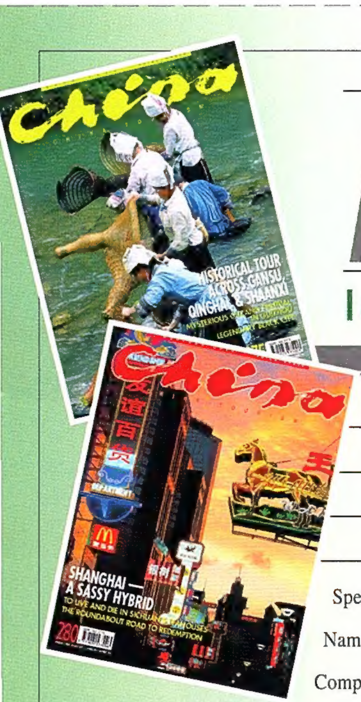
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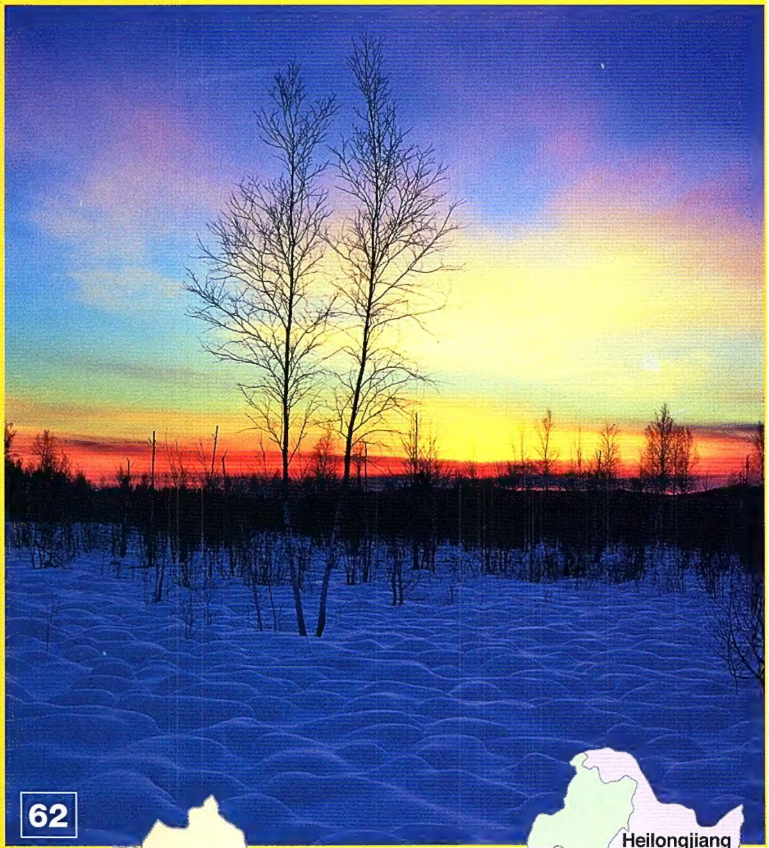

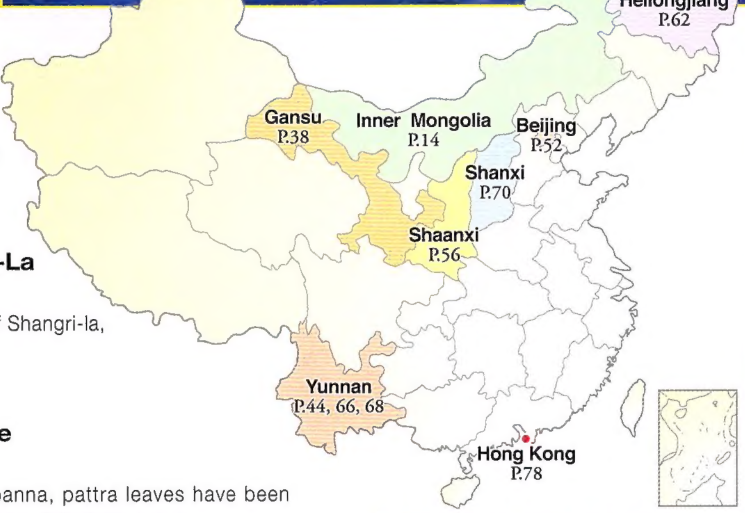
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Fairytale World of Rime Ice — Kuerbin

Photos & Article by Tan Wentou

I long for the onset of winter, so I can indulge my photographic obsession in Kuerbin's thick forests and endless snowfields.

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Photos & Article by Dou Weiyang

The annual Gedu Festival is held in Songtsen Ling Monastery of Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, on 29th of the Tibetan winter month.

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The Pattra-Leaf Buddhist Sutras of Dai People

Photos & Article by Li Zhisen

In the beautiful, abundant and mysterious land of Xishuangbanna, pattra leaves have been used for generations as the medium to pass on the culture of the Dai ethnic group.

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The Old Yuci City

Yuci City was built on the site of an old town of the Han Dynasty in AD 582, and is now 1,400 years old.

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The Street that "Meows": The Bric-a-Brac Paradise of Cat Street

Photos & Article by Maggie Lam

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A Mongolian
(by Zhu Qianmin)

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The sculpture at the entrance of Jilalin Village (by Huang Yanhong)

FROM THE EDITOR

The True Mongolian Experience

Take a close look at the Mongolian horses and you will probably understand how Genghis Khan once ruled the world.

These animals may not inspire confidence at the first glance, for they are generally small, non-pedigree, irritable, and have awkward, large heads. Yet, they are swift and they are the most robust horses in the world. The creatures can survive in conditions that would kill any other horse: regularly run up to half a hundred miles a day, routinely experience thousands of feet of altitude change, and graze through rigid ice for food in the harsh winter of -40°C or lower season after season.

Having a reputation as the best horsemen on earth, the Mongols are equally tough, but they are by no means small. Their faces are hard-lined, like carved sculptures after years of battling against the wind and the sun. However, they are also the most generous hosts. Once they catch sight of their guests, years-long friends or complete foreigners alike, they will literally drag them to their yurt and lay their absolute best food and wine on the table at once.

If you do have the chance, and I very much hope you do, come to Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, where there are only you being dwarfed under the immense vault of the blue skies and the endless open space. Good luck finding your true Mongolian experience.

English Edition

China

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The beginning of Chinese New Year (February, 2005) is normally a time for reflection and new direction, and we're starting this year by going **bimonthly with 56 more pages per issue,** giving you more in-depth coverage on topics that you're interested in. To ensure that a trail of footprints of China will be left in your heart, we will keep on adding a variety of new columns and page elements in the future, with "Action Buzz", "Flea Market" and "Let's Shop" being the starters.

Asides from bringing you the newest update, practical travel tips, street smart discounts, souvenir ideas and exotic adventures, we will also offers breadth and depth in issues that shaped China today.

With the new look, we continue to strive to better meet the needs of our readers!

Q & A:

When is the change effective?
China Tourism is going bimonthly (6 times a year), beginning with the March/April issue (no 296) in 2005.

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Nothing. If you signed on to China Tourism for a year, you'll still get 12 issues, regardless. But beginning in February 2005, the new yearly subscription will be 6 issues.

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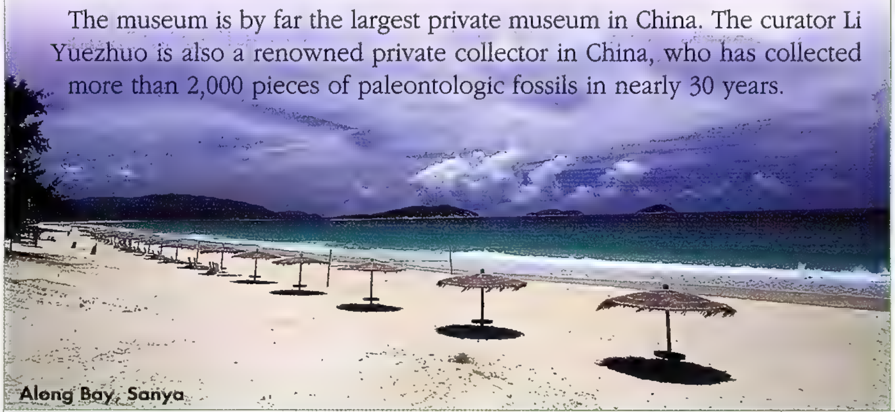
Largest Private Museum Settles in Sanya

China's largest private museum "Sanya Zhuoyuetianya Museum of Paleontologic Fossils", has made its home in Sanya of Hainan Province.

The Sanya Zhuoyuetianya Museum of Paleontologic Fossils covers a land of 2.4 ha by the beauty spot End of the Earth and has an exhibition area of 900 m^2. It will display 300 exhibits including fossils as precious as national treasures.

The museum is by far the largest private museum in China. The curator Li Yuezhuo is also a renowned private collector in China, who has collected more than 2,000 pieces of paleontologic fossils in nearly 30 years.



Along Bay, Sanya

Eco-System of the Yangtze May Collapse

According to Beijing media, the eco-system of China's largest river the Yangtze River may collapse within ten years as pollution problem is seriously threatening this world's third largest river.

Currently, Yangtze River receives more than 40% of the country's polluted water, which comes from factories along the river. In most cases, the polluted water enters the river without being treated. Now the Yangtze river is facing the extinction of some species, decrease of forest coverage, and the threat of drying up in some sections during the low water level period.

Last Emperor's Residence to be Restored

A restoration project of the old residence of Puyi, China's last emperor, has been launched in Tianjin municipality.

The residence, a major cultural site under the municipal protection, was built in 1921 and was used by Puyi from 1929 to 1931. After restoration of the residence, known as the Peaceful Garden, photo exhibitions will be held showcasing the life of the emperor in Tianjin and facts about the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s.

Tianjin City

Former Residence of Mao Zedong Reopens

A former residence of Mao Zedong, the founder of new China, reopened to visitors after a 50-day renovation.

In order to better protect the cultural relics and keep visiting in order, radio equipment and video monitors, including 13 pick-up microphones, were fixed for the first time both inside and outside of the building. Meanwhile, a shrine and memorial tablets of Mao's ancestors were restored in main hall of the building while originals of a scale and a ladle used for measuring rice were also recovered.

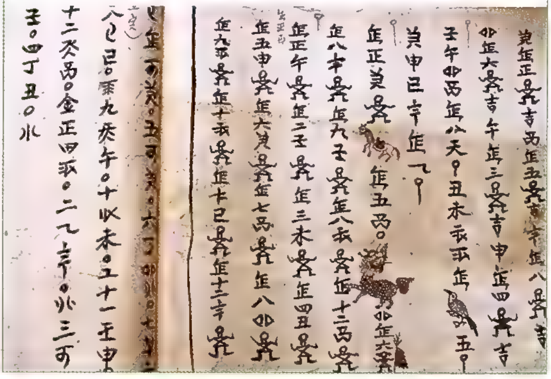
The building, which opened to visitors 54 years ago, has received approximately 50 million visitors. It was first renovated in 1952 and nearly resumed its original look and its second remedy was conducted in 1967.

Antique Coin with Rare Ethnic Writing Found in Guizhou

An antique copper coin inscribed with Shuishu, or the pictographic writings of China's Shui ethnic group, was found recently.

The coin was estimated to be made during the third emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty (998-1022). It bears two pictographs depicting a man pulling a water buffalo and another one pulling a plow. The buffalo and the plow are both tokens of fortune in Shuishu.

The southwestern Guizhou Province has nearly 370,000 people of the Shui ethnic group, or 90% of the country's total. Shuishu is on the verge of being lost as only very few Shui people know how to read the characters. China is now preparing to submit it to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation as an oral and intangible heritage of humanity.



China Awarded Wetland Protection Achievement Prize

China has been awarded an international environmental prize for its outstanding achievement in wetland protection and utilisation.

Wetland International gave award, which is the first of its kind, to China's State Forestry Bureau, saying China's experience in wetland conservation should be used as an example for other countries.

Panjin Wetland

China is conserving more than 350 wetland nature reserves and 21 wetlands have been listed on the key international wetland catalogue. Established in 1995, Wetland International is a non-profit international agency aimed at promoting wetland protection.

Cultural Relics Threatened as Never Before

Cultural relics in China are under critical threat from smugglers, tomb raiders and thieves, warned the State Administration of Cultural Heritage of China.

Smuggling and illegal excavations of Chinese relics have peaked since the 1990s, and the situation is worsening as the market for Chinese art booms both at home and abroad.

The authorities are having more difficulty than a decade ago to prevent the smuggling of Chinese art since smugglers have now developed more routes to get them abroad.

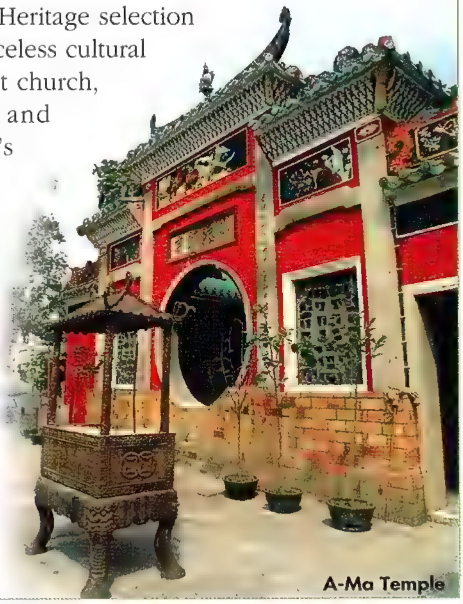
The Administration received reports of 36 criminal cases concerning the loss of relics in the collections of museums, Buddhist or Taoist temples and at historical sites in 2004. Among them, only seven have been cracked.

Macao Eyes Heritage List

The Macao government has listed 12 cultural relic sites as a package in its bidding for the World Cultural Heritage.

Macao's bid has been designated as China's only nomination to apply for the World Heritage selection of the UNESCO in 2005. The 12 priceless cultural heritage sites include China's oldest church, Christian cemetery, lighthouse and Western theater, scattered in Macao's urban areas. They are among the oldest, best preserved and largest European-style architecture clumps in China.

Over the past five years, the Macao Special Administrative Region government has appropriated 100 million patacas (US $12.5 million) in cultural protection funding, which went to the refurbishment of 20 cultural sites on average every year.


A-Ma Temple

Ancient Bazaar Revived Long Lost Glory

An ancient bazaar in Sideng town, which situates at the Shaxi region of Yunnan Province, was reconstructed recently with the help of a Swiss University.

The bazaar, situated near the famous old town Lijiang, came into existence in Qin Dynasties (221~206 BC). It used to be a major stopping-off point on the long forgotten "tea and horse caravan trail" that connects the region with Tibet and southeast Asia. It had fallen into decline until in 2001, the World Monuments Fund placed the area on its list of 100 world sites in danger and raised money for a restoration project. The Buddhist temple and theatre were restored according to the style of Ming and Qing dynasties.

Nevertheless, the project is not an architectural renovation but an integrated plan to boost socio-economic development in the Shaxi Valley. The second stage of the rehabilitation of Shaxi will encompass broad economic and social objectives.

Nanjing Plans to Rebuild Old Pagoda

The Dabao'ensi Pagoda, a 580-year-old relic destroyed a century and a half ago, will be rebuilt.

The Pagoda was built by the Ming (1368-1644) Emperor Zhu Di, in 1421 in memory of his mother. After more than 400 years, it was destroyed in war during the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864), with only ruins were left behind.

Last year, the government decided to rebuild the pagoda but is still in the progress of making the final design plan. Including the 200 million yuan (US $24 million) for the reconstruction of the pagoda, the whole project is expected to cost about 600 million yuan (US $72 million).

HAINAN

Ferry Promotes Links between Mainland and Island

China's first ocean-going railway ferry was in use recently. From now on, it only takes about 12 hours for trains to complete the journey from Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, to Haikou, the Hainan provincial capital, which include a sea voyage across the Qiongzhou Straits.

Construction of the railway project, that includes two railway ferry piers in two cities, costed more than 4.8 billion yuan (US $583 million). A pair of passenger trains will operate daily between Guangzhou and Haikou. Each train will include 15 cars with a capacity of 630 persons. The price of a hard seat ticket on the train will be 138 yuan (US $17), while a hard sleeper single ticket reaches 257 yuan (US $31).

INNER MONGOLIA

Border City in North China Opens Airport

The airport of Manzhouli, a city that borders Russia and Mongolia, was opened in December in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

The new airport, located 9 km southwest of the city proper, covers 166,700 m^2 with a 2,400-m-long runway. Construction of Manzhouli Airport, a key project for China's Civil Aviation Administration in the 10th Five Year Plan period (2001-2005), involved an investment of 158 million yuan (US $19 million).

The airport will further Sino-Russian trade and economic cooperation, and bolster the development of tourism in Manzhouli city.

Manzhouli City

HONG KONG

Jetstar Asia Became 5th Budget Airline in HK

Jetstar Asia became the fifth budget airline operating from Hong Kong International Airport, in addition to Valuair, Cebu Pacific, Orient Thailand and Australian Airlines.

Jetstar Asia provided a total of 140 flights a week to Southeast Asian and Australian destinations including Singapore, Manila of the Philippines, Thailand's Bangkok, Phuket and Australia's Cairns.

SHANGHAI

Geological Museum Opened in Shanghai

The Oriental Geological Popular Science Museum was opened recently in Shanghai, with two major dinosaur skeletons and a huge plaster replica of crystal on display.

Located near the Pudong International Airport, the museum consists of five exhibition halls, which displays the typical geology-related specimens and samples, enabling visitors to have an overall understanding of the Earth.

One of the exhibit was the skeleton of a dinosaur excavated in Zigong, Sichuan Province in 1996. It is a carnivorous dinosaur that roamed the planet about one billion years ago. Another key exhibit is a 3.6-m-tall plaster crystal which is hailed as the biggest sample of its kind in the world.

SHAANXI

New Air Route to Link NW China with Singapore

A new air route linking Xi'an, capital of northwest Shaanxi Province, and Singapore via Guangzhou was officially launched. With Boeing-757 and Airbus-320 in service, the new route is the first international airline launched by China Southern Airlines connecting Xi'an with the outside world. Flights are available every day.

For a long time, passengers from Xi'an and northwest China had to change flights in Hong Kong before they arrived in southeast Asia, which has been quite inconvenient. The new air route will help to boost local tourism and further expand the city's exchanges with the southeast Asia.

Xi'an City

LIAONING

First Express Passenger Trains across China

The first express passenger trains had started to run between Shenyang, capital of northeast China's Liaoning Province, and Shenzhen in southern China.

The train journey is 3,151 km long and takes 37 hours and 25 minutes. With air-conditioned passenger trains leaving the North Railway Station of Shenyang at 5:22 p.m. every day. The train will arrive at Shenzhen at 6:47 a.m. on the third day. Trains leave Shenzhen at 9:13 p.m. each day and arrives at Shenyang at 9:50 a.m. on the third day. The train passes through nine provinces and municipalities, and crosses four major rivers. Travellers can visit scenic spots along the railway such as Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi Province, and Jinggang Mountains in Hunan Province.

TIBET

Qinghai-Tibet Railway Enters Last Town towards Lhasa

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway extended its way into Gulu Town in Nagqu County in northern Tibet — the last stop before it reaches Lhasa in December, 2004. Gulu Town is only 217 km away from Lhasa, and according to sources from the railway construction headquarters, construction is proceeding as scheduled. Currently, workers are laying tracks in freezing snows and biting winds, where the average temperature is normally -30°C.

Tibet, with an area of more than 1.2 million km^2, approximately one eighth of China's territory, was the only provincial area in China without an inch of operating railway. The raiway, the cost of which is expected to be 26.2 billion yuan (US $3.16 billion), is scheduled to open in 2007.

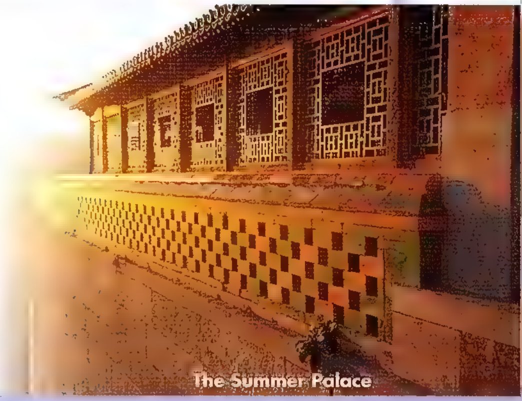
BEIJING

Ticket Price for Imperial Palace to Rise

Ticket prices for six World Cultural Heritage Sites are set to rise. The six sites includes the Imperial Palace, the Great Wall, the Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven, and two of the tombs in The Ming Tombs complex.

Up till now, entrance charges for the six sites were relatively low when compared with other tourist spots in China. The local government decided to raise tickets prices so that maintaining and protecting these heritages sites can be better accomplished.

Entrance to the Imperial Palace, for example, will be increased to 80 RMB and 100 RMB, depending on the season, from the current 40 RMB and 60 RMB respectively. However, the effective day of the price hikes has not yet been decided.



The Summer Palace

XINJIANG

First Electric Railway Kicked Off

Construction of the first electrified railway in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the Jinghe-Yining-Horgos railway, was officially launched recently.

The railway starts from Jinghe County in the east, stretching across Tianshan Mountain, and finally reaches the border port of Horgos. It has a total length of 286 km. There are altogether 17 stations along the railway and the construction is scheduled to complete by 2008. The railway is supposed to have great significance in the acceleration economic development along the line and the consolidatioan of China's northwest frontier.

Tianshan Mountain

HONG KONG

New Ferry Service to Hong Kong

A new ferry service has opened linking Zhongshan in Guangdong Province to Hong Kong International Airport.

The ferryboat leaves Zhongshan at 10:30 a.m. and returns from Hong Kong at 2 p.m. The whole journey takes a little over one hour. This new service eliminates the Hong Kong visa application process for travellers intending to take international flights in Hong Kong. They can now take the ferryboat and complete all exit procedures at the Hong Kong International Airport.

HUBEI

Southern Airlines Open Flights to Paris

China Southern Airlines opened a flight between Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei Province, and Paris. Passengers on the flight will have to transfer planes in Guangzhou.

The flight covers 11,000 km, with a flight time of 1 hour 20 minutes from Wuhan to Guangzhou and 13 hours from Guangzhou to Paris.

The flight takes off from Wuhan at 6:20 p.m. every Tuesday, Friday and Sunday. The return flight leaves Paris at 11:30 a.m. local time each Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. The first-class ticket is currently sold at 11,000 yuan (US $1,325), while the business-class ticket at 4,300 yuan (US $518).

The herders hurriedly making their way to the Winter Nadamu Festival

Hulunbuir — the beautiful grasslands of Inner Mongolia.

We often imagine grasslands to be lush and green. The Hulunbuir Grasslands, on the contrary, is a vast icescape of glistening silvery snow, complete with bone-chilling weather during the winter.

The string of activities during winter is endless — skiing, beauty pageants, Ji Ao Bao (the traditional sacrificial offering to the Mongolian Cairns), and many more. The Winter Nadamu Festival is even more fun and exciting with various activities and games, such as horse riding, Mongolian wrestling and camel sledge racing. It doesn't lose out to the Summer Nadamu Festival in terms of fun and activity.

The Silver Hulunbuir

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

The Winter Festival is no longer only found at the Ice City. The snow-covered grasslands are brought alive with the beautiful sounds of resounding singing and clattering horses. Large crowds gather at the Hulunbuir Winter Nadamu Festival and the warm and spirited atmosphere makes the bitter cold a distant memory.

Hulunbuir is located in northeast China, bordering Russia and Mongolia. In recent years, it has been converted from a league to a city. I'm still more used to calling it a league as it exudes more of the Mongolian grasslands flavour.

Hulunbuir is more than just a vast area of grasslands — there are also many lakes, rivers, forests and hills. The beautiful scenery of the grasslands during summer, the exciting tournaments at the Nadamu Festival and the interesting customs and traditions of the Mongolian herders are overwhelming, and difficult to part with.

The excitement in autumn lies in visiting Eerguna, Genhe and Yakeshi — the quaint Russian villages, the rapid flowing Eerguna Boundary River and the vibrantly colourful Daxinganling Forest Region never fail to excite even tourists who are revisiting.

Freezing the Fun on the Grasslands

Having never been there during winter, I was intrigued by descriptions I had heard — that despite the -30°C to -40°C temperature and snow-covered conditions, summer activities such as the Nadamu Festival and Ji Ao Bao can still be held — which prompted my decision to visit Hulunbuir in winter.

On arrival in Beijing, I spent an entire day making preparations for my trip to Hulunbuir. I bought gloves, winter headgear, thermal underclothing, windbreakers and the list goes on... I even bought a type of thermal patch, which is meant for keeping the body warm. But I intended it for my camera as it was said to be able to slow down the power consumption of batteries. The most amusing thing I bought has to be the thermal face protector that covers the whole face except the eyes, which makes me look very much like a terrorist. At last count, I had spent 2,000 yuan.

Birthplace of the Famous Song "The Mongolian Cairn Meet"

The train from Beijing to Hailar, Hulunbuir's capital, arrived at Hailar the day before the commencement of the Winter Nadamu Festival. Nadamu, which means "entertainment" or "games" in Mongolian, is a traditional Mongolian Festival. During the reign of Genghis Khan, there were grand celebrations after every victorious battle. Initially, they celebrated only with songs and dances but subsequently, events such as wrestling, horse racing and archery tournaments were included. Traditionally, Nadamu Festivals are held during summer. In order to attract more tourists, the Winter Nadamu Festival began three years ago.

The first activity today is the Ji Ao Bao. Originally, the Mongolian Cairn (Ao Bao) was just a pile of stones on the grasslands, indicating direction. Later on, they evolved

1. The wrestling competition, a traditional event in the Nadamu Festival, is seldom held during winter.
2. The contestants grew up on horseback.
3. A bonfire party was held at Nandun on the opening night of the Winter Nadamu Festival.

into road Gods and mountain Gods. Hence began the worship and sacrificial offerings. Today, Ji Ao Bao remains an important Mongolian tradition. Due to its distinctive traditional flavour, it has become the most popular attraction for tourists.

The Ji Ao Bao ceremony is held at Bayinhushuo in the Ewenki Banner.

The Bayinhushuo Cairn is well known in China. Many years ago, the movie "The People of the Grasslands" was filmed on the Hulunbuir Grasslands. The composer of the movie theme song had found his inspiration here and penned the song "The Mongolian Cairn Meet". After so many years, the song is still well remembered and sung by many.

Braving the strong winds and snow, the Mongolian Cairn stands solitary on the top of the hill. By the time I reached, the ceremony had already begun. The lamas, wearing their ceremonial robes and hats, were in the midst of their ritual. The candles and incense were lit and the chanting of the scriptures sounded through the grasslands. A crowd of herders and tourists had gathered around to watch the ritual. The Mongolian Cairn and the entire hill were strewn with twigs of chaste tree and red and green banners. The table was filled with all sorts of offerings such as wine, cheese and fruit.

The chief lama presiding over the ceremony was sitting behind the offering table with a rosary in his hand and

chanting. When the lamas on both sides chanted some instructions, the herders promptly turned to face the chief lama and then, they walked around the Mongolian Cairn three times in a clockwise direction. We, the tourists, decided to follow suit and earnestly joined in the procession by following behind the herders.

The Howling Wind, the Swift Horses and the Falling Snowflakes

After the Ji Ao Bao ceremony, we hurried to the Ewenki Banner at Nandun where the Winter Nadamu Festival opening ceremony was going to be held.

Along the way, we saw many herders, young and old, hurriedly making their way to the same venue on cars, motorcycles, horse and sledges. When we reached Nandun, the entire place was filled with the sounds of grand and majestic music. The usually quiet and peaceful grasslands were at once transformed into a lively and bustling place. The contestants for the tournaments gathered together, looking excited and enthusiastic. There were also many spectators who had gathered to watch the fun and excitement. At -25°C, the blowing wind was chilling to the bone.

The first event was the horse race. This was the first time I had seen horse racing in the snow and it was indeed an eye opener. When the command to start the race was given, the contestants and their horses sprinted out in a frenzy. Amidst the falling snow, the blurry view of the running horses resembled fluctuating reflections.

Mongolians have always been referred to as "the people on horseback". The herders, especially, are inseparable from their horses. As a result of modernisation, we are seeing less and less yurts and traditional wooden carts. However, horse riding still remains the Mongolian forte.

The Camel Sledge Race

After the horse race, it was time for the camel sledge race. Camels pulling sledges is a common sight among the locals but to the tourists, it was something new. The contestants looked extremely small sitting on top of the huge camels. Under the command of their masters, the well-trained and obedient camels raced

1. **Braving the wind and the snow early in the morning, the people come to Ji Ao Bao.**
2. **The highlight of the events was the camel sledge race.**
3. **The Bayinhushuo Mongolian Cairn, birthplace of the famous song "The Mongolian Cairn Meet", is the most well known cairn in Inner Mongolia.**
4. **The herders training their horses on the snow-covered plains.**

forward with all their might. The excited spectators applauded and cheered loudly.

There are not many camels on the Hulunbuir. Camels are mainly used for transportation and grazing purposes. During winter, on the snow-covered roads, the camel sledges become the main transportation tool for the herders.

The next event was the wrestling competition, which is one of the traditional customs of the Mongolians. I was totally awed by the wrestlers' well-built and muscular bodies, and even more so by their amazing tolerance of the winter cold. All they had on was the wrestling attire, which meant that their arms and chest were exposed to the chilling wind. And when they fell to the ground, they had to endure the cold bite of the snow. Perhaps it was this that added to the excitement of the match. The exuberant spectators contributed to the excitement and enjoyment of the atmosphere as they applauded and cheered the contestants on.

Skiing at the Phoenix Villa

Skiing is one of the highlights of the Winter Nadamu Festival. Due to the long winter at the Hulunbuir, there is an abundance of resources for winter activities. The ski field is at the Phoenix Villa. It has undulating ski runs meandering through the hills and valleys, which is perfect for ski practice and tournaments. Since 1986, the local amateur skiing team has sent more than 20 outstanding team members to join the People's Liberation Army 81 Skiing Team for competitions, achieving excellent results at the national games.

Situated at the border of Daxinganling, the Phoenix Villa is also known as the "City of Forests". Setting off from Hailar, we managed to reach the Phoenix Villa in two hours. The surroundings are pleasantly elegant. The undulating hills are covered with a thick layer of snow and little European-style cottages with red roofs decorated the snow-capped hills.

3

The ski field covers an area of 2,500 ha and is situated in the heart of the pine and white birch forests at 600 to 900 m above sea level. During the opening ceremony, the 81 Skiing Team displayed their excellent alpine skiing skills while 30 members of the Yakeshi City Mianduhe High School Amateur Skiing Team practiced cross-country alpine skiing. One by one, the skilled skiers slid down the winding runs in rhythmic succession, dashing through the glistening snow.

After the performance, spectators bitten by the ski bug eagerly changed into their skiing gear. Even though the coach was on hand to give them instruction, the beginners found themselves falling and rolling all over. Even more tourists had gone over to the snow world to try out the tyre slides. There were screams and laughter everywhere as people bumped into one another.

4

1. Sliding down the snow-capped hills on the tyre slides.
2. Phoenix Villa exudes the charm of a small European town.
3. The winter activities attracted many visitors.
4. Yakeshi is a popular ski field in Hulunbuir.

1

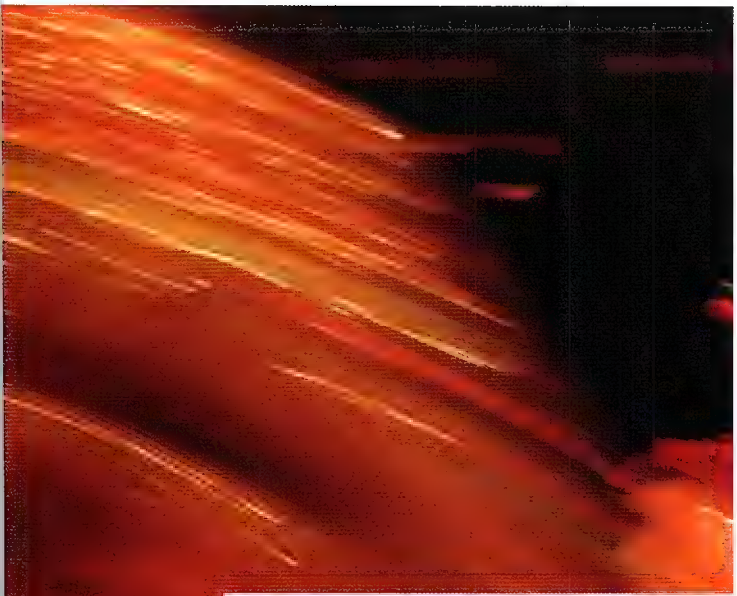
The Beauty Pageant

Our last stop for the Winter Festival is Manchuria, a bustling city at the border. Throughout history, this place had been the green pastures of the nomadic tribes. However, at the beginning of the last century, after the construction of the Middle East Railway, it progressively developed into the largest border port in Northern China.

Today's Manchuria exudes an air of Russian charm. Apart from the old bus stops, streets, customs houses and residences built more than 100 years ago, many new Russian-style buildings have been constructed. In order to create the image of a northern border city, ice sculptures can be found everywhere in the city. Even the police stations, fire stations, banks and schools have their own custom-made ice sculptures at the main entrances. A snow world was also created at the city centre square. The ice sculptures glistening under the spotlights looked exceptionally dazzling.

The beauty pageant was the highlight of the Manchuria winter activities. The contestants hailed from China, Mongolia and Russia. The entrance was already packed with people two hours before the beginning of the pageant. The admission tickets do not come cheap, at a price of 300 yuan. Even with the tickets, it wasn't an easy task gaining admission, having to squeeze my way through the crowd.

The pageant finally started and one by one, the beauty contestants took their turns to impress the judges. Unfortunately for China and Mongolia, the limited number of contestants paled beside the stunning Russian beauties. The final results were as expected — the Russian contestants won the top three titles. Their graceful flair and glowing radiance enchanted and captivated the audience. Finally, the contest ended with the top three winners each holding a one-metre long cheque and waving goodbye to the audience with their megawatt dazzling smiles.



КНР, РФ
и Монголии

2

3

1. **The Buliyate people are good at singing and dancing. Among the many Mongolian tribes, they have managed to preserve the most customs and traditions.**
2. **Winners of the beauty pageant.**
3. **The China contestants of the Manchuria Beauty Pageant.**

Life at -40°C

The Winter Festival is no longer only found at the Ice City. The snow-covered grasslands are brought alive with the beautiful sounds of resounding singing and clattering horses. Large crowds gather at the Hulunbuir Winter Nadamu Festival and the warm and spirited atmosphere makes the bitter cold a distant memory.

Departing from Hailar, we passed by a tourist spot called Jinzhanghan within the Chenbaerhu Banner region. The tourist spot had entered the sleeping winter mode and had become very quiet. There were yurts and wooden carts scattered all over the snow-covered ground. Even then, the scenery remained enchantingly beautiful. From where we were, we could see the pastures and sheep far away.

Dead from the Snowstorm

With an iron fence surrounding the vast pastures, I only managed to find the entrance to the pastures after a long search. There were more than 300 sheep on the pastures. The keeper of the sheep was very friendly and took the initiative to come forward to greet me. I was surprised when I find out that she actually came from Henan. According to the keeper, her uncle was the first to come. He had made it big after shepherding for just a few years and now owns more than 4,000 sheep. She herself came over seven or eight years ago and is making more money than before in Henan. Her whole family had also moved over and her three children are currently attending school here.

1

However, she complained about the cold climate. Her sheep were only let out to roam around in the day and could only graze on hay. So, she would have to feed them again with her stocked up grass reserves at night. She is also keeping more than 10 cows, but they are afraid of the cold and refuse to graze in the day. A couple of years ago, a snowstorm had hit the town. Fortunately for her, they had sufficient grass reserves and managed to get through the difficult period. Some others, who did not stock up on grass, were not as fortunate — their sheep died of starvation as the snow was too thick for grazing.

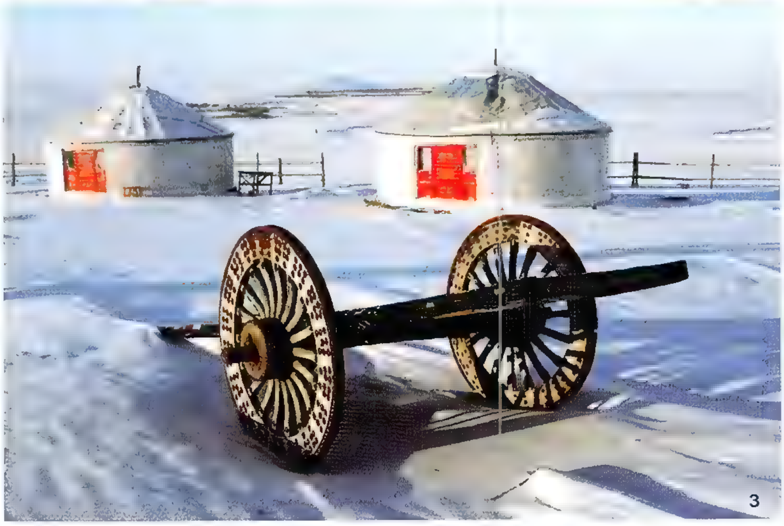
2

The Desolate Heishantou

Soon, we arrived at Eerguna City where Genghis Khan was born. During the 13th century, after Genghis Khan had unified the Mongolian tribes, the land was divided into territories. The Eerguna region was later distributed to his brother, Jochi-Kasar, and had its capital at today's Heishantou. Unfortunately, very few ancient relics can be found here.

When we arrived, the ancient city was in a

1. **Walking outside in the snow, a layer of frost quickly forms on the face.**
2. **Horses scavenging for food on the snow-covered grasslands.**
3. **The yurts and wooden carts scattered throughout the vast snow-covered grasslands.**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desolate state and not a single tourist was in sight. There was only a man, Mr. Han, guarding the place. Mr. Han used to work at the Hailar Museum for about six or seven years. When the Heishantou Management Station was set up, he became the one and only resident of the ancient city.

Mr. Han took us on a leisurely walk around the ancient city.

The ancient city is divided into the inner and the outer cities. The outer city is square in shape with a perimetre of around two kilometres. The city walls, made of earth, and generally about one to two metres tall with the highest point above four metres, are mostly in ruins. A moat surrounds the city walls, and gates guard all four sides. The inner city is rectangular in shape with a perimetre of 560 m. There is also a moat surrounding the outer city and a door each on its east and west sides.

Walking along the ruins, we were somehow reminded of the glory days of Genghis Khan. Now, the ancient city is but a deserted and forgotten place.

Mr. Han does not earn much from his job. He was making a salary of 300 yuan per month for the first year, 200 yuan per month for the second year and for the third year (which is next year), he would not be receiving a salary. However, Mr. Han has no complaints. That's because the Cultural Management Department had invested in a total of 60 sheep together with the local forest management that had also set aside a piece of land for grazing. Every year, Mr. Han would be receiving 20% of the proceeds. He has done his calculations and is confident that his earnings will increase yearly once the sheep start breeding. Before we left, Mr. Han gleefully brought us to visit the sheep and the three newborn lambs.

Waliwala's Mouth-Watering Dishes

At night, we arrived at Labudalin town, home to the Eerguna Municipality. Apart from the beautiful natural scenery, there are also many descendants of Chinese-Russian mixed marriages here who have managed to retain Russian traditional customs. We paid a visit to a family of Chinese-Russian descendants. Our hostess, Mrs. Zhao, is now managing an animal husbandry and dairying business in her retirement. Her husband was not at home and her children were all either working or studying.

Mrs. Zhao had invited one of her friends, Waliwala, to help out at the kitchen. Waliwala is an extremely humorous girl who is really chatty. She was full of praise for the Eerguna sheep. Her claim that the sheep fed on Chinese herbs and mineral water, which results in urine and excrement with medicinal properties made us laugh our heads off.

Waliwala, who used to manage a western cuisine restaurant in Manchuria, was an expert chef. We were greatly impressed by the delectable western cuisine she had prepared for us. There were eggplant steaks, rice with wild fruit sauce, potato and

1. **The sheep enclosure looks seemingly lonesome on the snow-covered ground.**
2. **The desolate Heishantou ancient city**
3. **Having a scrumptious meal at the home of a Chinese-Russian family**
4. **Bringing the sheep home in the chilling winter**

meat cakes, Russian pies, and other delicacies. There was also a steamed fish, which had been imported from Russia. Even now, the thought of the scrumptious meal we had makes my mouth water.

In the evening, we visited another family of Chinese-Russian descendants. The host had just gone out but the hostess Naja was at home. Naja was born in the Soviet Union in 1923 and is now 81 years old. In 1927, she moved to China and stayed in Taiping Town. There, she met a Korean and married him. Unfortunately in 1945, her husband was captured and beaten to death by the Japanese during the war. Later on, she moved back to the Soviet Union where she met her current husband, Wang Jiarong. While we were chatting, her husband returned with a bundle of firewood. He put down the firewood, shook off the snowflakes and sat at the table.

The Turbulent Years of the Chinese-Russian Descendants

Mr. Wang was also born in the Soviet Union but his father hailed from Shandong Laizhou. In 1937, he was working in a gold mine together with some other Chinese labourers when they met and killed some invading Japanese soldiers. He escaped to the Soviet Union and joined the Red Army. In 1945, he led a troop of Red Army soldiers into China....

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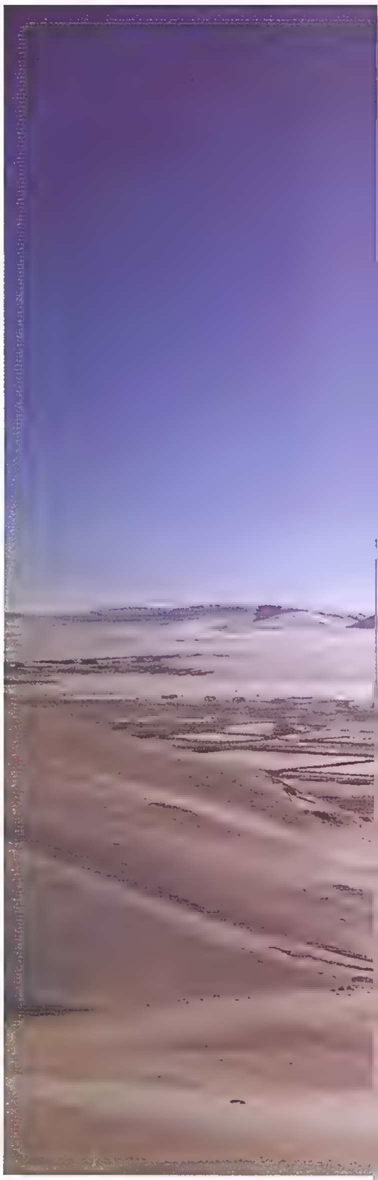


After my visits to the families of Chinese-Russian descendants and hearing so many interesting stories, I came to realise that they all had one thing in common — they had all lived through years of war and turbulence. Putting the past behind them, they now enjoy a tranquil and peaceful life.

Our journey up north towards Jilalin continued. Due to the heavy snow, the roads were blocked and we had to change our route and travel through Qika, a border village. From far, we could see the frontier defence sentry and the flag waving on the top of the hill. With permission, we ascended the hill and found a wooden cross at the top. According to the locals, it was erected by a Russian lady 10 years ago. Standing at the top of the hill, it watches and blesses the whole village.

We were hosted by a family staying at the foot of the hill. Our host Auntie Du was really chatty. While preparing the meal for us, she told us a story:

"My father was a pure Russian. My grandfather died during the First World War and life became very difficult for the family. In 1930, when my father was only 12, they moved to China. Shortly, my grandmother met and married my step-grandfather. He had come to the Soviet Union from Hebei Changzhou to pan for gold and was too ashamed to return when he had failed to strike it rich. He married my grandmother after he was introduced to her and they later moved to Enhe. At that time, Enhe was just established. Our family was the first to build a house there."

Pointing at her reticent husband, she said, "His family was poor while our family was rich. During the Cultural Revolution, he had to protect me. Now, I'm the one protecting him".

We left in the snow in our car, with Auntie Du's peals

of laughter trailing off behind us....

Putting Ourselves to the Test in the Bitter Cold

In the early evening, we reach Enhe, a huge village with an air of Russian charm, and checked in to a small hotel.

When we woke up the next morning, we found out that it wasn't an easy task going to the toilet. The washroom was half open-air and the chilling wind was whistling through the open roof. The temperature in the early morning was close to -40°C and a layer of frost quickly formed on any exposed flesh.

Water was easily obtainable as the well was located inside the house. We had to first pour in a bowl of water, push the pump and then water would flow out from the spout. Fortunately, the water from the eight-metre deep well was not too cold. But not every household has its own well. Those without one would have to collect their water from the river or buy their water. A special water tanker drives past every household in the morning and sells water at five cents per bucket. Naturally, collecting water from the river during winter is not easy. The layer of ice on the river surface must first be chiselled off before water can be scooped from the river.

In the morning, I followed some children as they went out to play. Watching them slide down from the top of the hill in their sledges, I was tempted to climb up as well, hoping that I could take some panoramic pictures of the Enhe village. Halfway through climbing, I realised that the slopes were too steep and slippery and had to give up. I carefully slid down the slopes but still ended up with two big holes in my 300-yuan thermal pants.

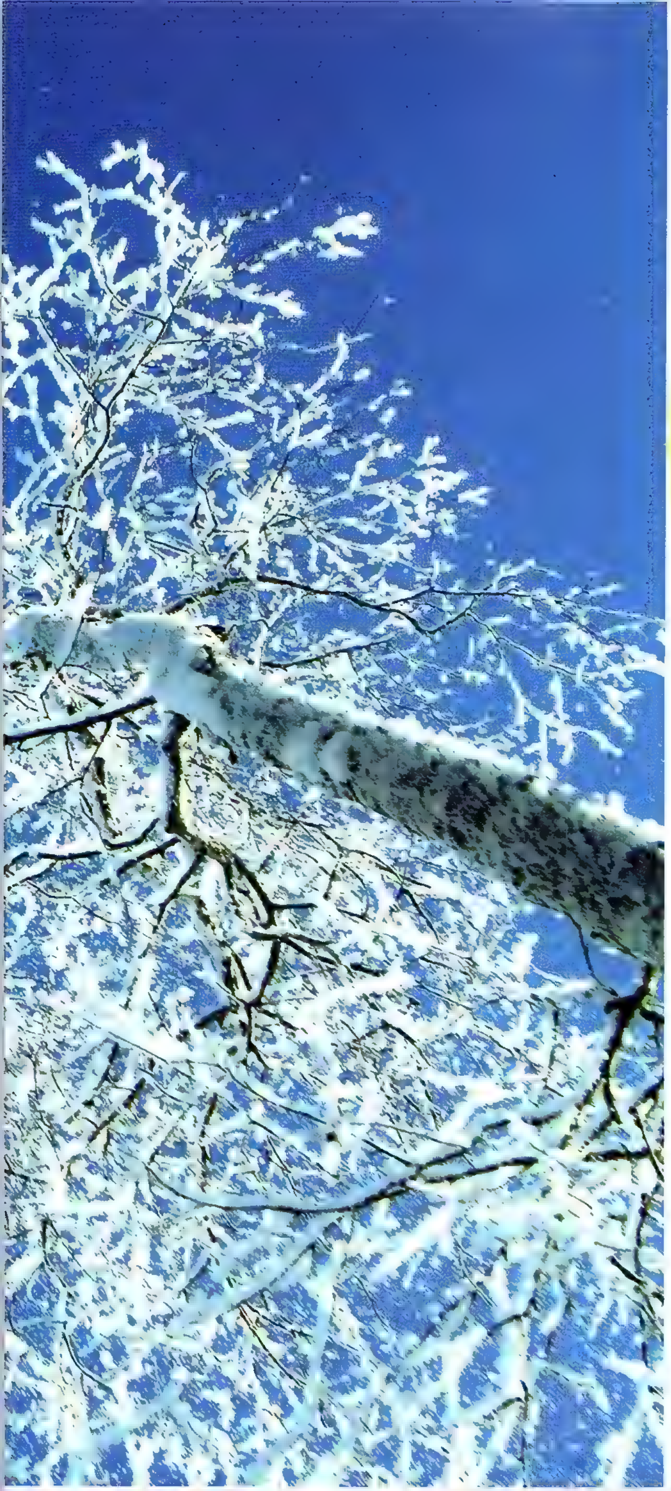
1. Auntie Du and her husband are both descendents of Chinese-Russian mixed marriages.
2. Herders chisel the ice to reach water for the cows to drink.
3. Qika is a small beautiful village at the border of China and Russia.

1

Apart from the vast grasslands in Hulunbuir, there are also forests in the Hulunbuir. The Daxinganling located at its eastern part is the biggest coniferous forest in China. It is here that generations of Ewenki and Elunchun tribal people have hunted and fished for a living. The winter forest is far from lonesome — the lumberjacks are at their busiest; the hunters busy themselves by setting up tourist sites, and the beautiful glittering icicles on the trees make tourists jump with excitement.

After leaving Enhe, we stayed in Jilalin for two days before continuing our journey along the Eerguna River to the Daxinganling Moerdaoga Forest Region. Throughout the bumpy ride on the overcrowded bus, I kept feeling that the wheels were locked up. The driving skills of the local drivers are exceptional. Even without the antilock brake system, they managed to get us to our destination in one piece.

The Daxinganling Mountain Region extends more than 1,400 km and stretches horizontally over 150 to 300 km like a giant canopy. Sitting between the Inner Mongolia



Winter Arrives in Daxinganling

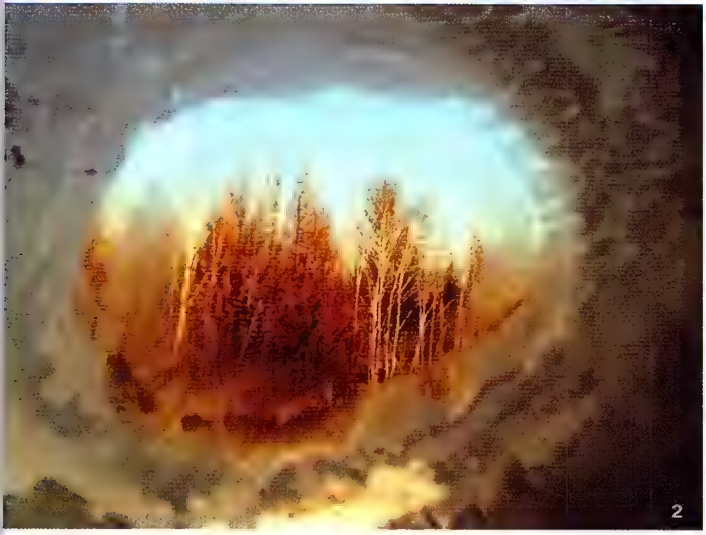
plateau and the Songliao Plain, it covers a total area of 280,000 km^2, with more than three quarters of it extending into the Inner Mongolia region.

During the Tang and Liao Dynasties, it was named "Jinshan" and was also known as the "Haciwenshan" during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, which meant the "Bare Black Mountains". It only obtained the name "Daxinganling" during the Qing Dynasty, a transliteration of the Mongolian word "Xingandabahan", which means mountain ridges.

The Difference of the Seasons

Having been to Daxinganling twice, I must say that each time I came, the feeling was entirely different. The first time I came was during summer to Mangui. The weather in the forest was extremely cool, especially in the early morning. The second time I came was during autumn when I wandered through the Eerguna Forest Region. Autumn is an excellent time for photography as well as for grazing. The forests are filled with vibrant colours with the crisp, cool autumn breeze drifting in the air. The beautiful sight of the falling leaves simply lifts one's spirits. In the primitive forest, there are also more than 10 different species of wild fruit. There are wild grapes, wild strawberries, and also a type of small red wild fruit known as red peas, which the Russian tribal people love to make into fruit jam and eat with bread.

1. The white birch forest turns silvery white in winter.
2. Looking out from the window as we entered the Daxinganling region, we were enthralled by the beautiful scenery. (by Sun Jing)
3. The frozen art of Ice Flowers (by Sun Jing)



Now, it's winter at the Daxinganling. The beautiful pine trees, which are the main species in the Daxinganling, cover the entire forest. There are also white birch trees, poplar trees and oak trees. The most eye-catching are the camphor pines, also known as the "beauty pines". The evergreen camphor pines are resistant to the winter cold and mostly found on mountain slopes facing the sun. Some of the camphor pines, which are more than 200 years old, have trunks more than one metre in diameter.

A Tree Felled in Less than a Minute

We came to Moerdaoga, a beautiful small town within the forest region.

My friend, who is working for the Forest Industry Department, brought us to the forest management area to watch the tree felling process. The forest management headquarter is located deep in the forest. Their office, living quarters and kitchen are all located within a simple row of sheds. The weather had suddenly turned cold but the office was still very warm. An iron furnace, converted from a huge oil barrel, was lying horizontally across the floor. The team leader carried over a bundle of half-metre long wood and threw two pieces into the fire, causing the flames to instantly spit out from the crevice of the furnace cover. According to the team leader, the furnace consumes as much as three huge bundles of wood everyday.

Their section comprises of 21 members. Apart from the few who are logistics crew, the rest are all in the felling operations team. Every August, they would be busy making preparations for the felling operation — building the sheds, setting up the site and building the several thousand metres long pulley system track. In September, the tree felling operation would start, to be completed by April the following year. For around four to five months every year, they have nothing to do, as during this period, the forest region is extremely muddy and any transporting of wood is made impossible.

Curious about how a tree is felled, I decided to make a trip to the operations site.

My first stop was the wood gathering site, which is a large open space in the forest. There, I saw stacks of wood piled all over the site and a tractor coming through the forest with a huge bundle of wood. The workers here wake up at 5 am every morning to load the wood gathered the day before onto the delivery truck to be transported out of the forest.

At the felling operations site, I saw two lumberjacks in a team. One, the chainsaw handler, was holding a huge and heavy chainsaw and started cutting the tree. After much ear-deafening buzz and flying sawdust, the tree started tilting to one side; the other, the pole handler, was supporting the tree with a pole from beginning to end. I noticed that the wooden pole, about eight metres long, had iron prongs to prevent the tree from slipping off. At the crucial moment, the pole handler would have to exert a great amount of strength to control the direction of the felled tree. Within a minute, a 30 or 40 cm-thick pine had fallen to the ground with a loud crash.

The chainsaw handler told us that they used to fell more than 10 m^3 a day. Now, they are only allowed to fell less than 10 m^3 a day. If they exceeded the limit, they would not be rewarded, but punished.

I asked him what kind of trees could be felled.

"Mature and over-mature forests must be felled without delay. Otherwise, it will be wasted."

Through the years, many forests in China have been over-felled. In 1998, a forest conservation project was implemented, which set down stringent quotas on the number of trees to be felled. Only selected felling could be done. Apart from that, a major project was also implemented to create forests. Now, many felling operations staff had changed their jobs to become forest rangers. The government has also provided a grant for forest protection. At present, the Daxinganling forest region has increased to a total area of 122.28 million ac.

Earning Seven to Eight Thousand in Winter

We took a train from Moerdaoga and reached Genhe in a few hours. My friend Lu, a local, brought us to Section

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223 at the Haolipu forest management area. The trees here are smaller than those at Moerdaoga. The trees felled here are mostly surpluses — thin logs that are not suitable as wood material. Work here is tough, as they do not have tractors or other equipment, only horse sledges. The workers told us that they own their own horses and that they can earn up to 8,000 yuan each winter. During summer, they have to look for other jobs to do.

They have worked here for four years and soon, they will be moving to another place to begin their felling operation on a piece of forest burnt down by a forest fire. Only then can new forests be created.

The smaller team may not be as efficient but their work shed was very innovative. They had used canvas for the roof and the fences, and surrounded the shed with two layers of plastic cloth. It was warm and allowed sunlight to shine through, which was much better than a tent. Near the felling site was an Ewenki tribe hunting spot, where hunters from the Aoluguya Village in Mangui had relocated. They stay in a cotton tent and had another two tents for storing their belongings. It is a popular tourist spot for observing reindeers.

There was an old man, Geliyake, inside the tent. According to Lu, he is the only Ewenki in the entire Daxinganling who is able to make boats from birch tree barks. Unfortunately, this is a dying skill.

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1. **The lumberjack supports the falling tree with a long pole to control its direction. (by Sun Jing)**
2. **Trucks used for transporting wood in the Daxinganling Forest Region**
3. **Workers in Genhe forest transport wood using horse sledges. (by Sun Jing)**
4. **Winter is the busiest period for felling operations in the Moerdaoga Forest Region.**

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Geliyake is very familiar with the forest. He has walked through the entire forest and never loses his way here. He is most proud of his shooting skills.

"My shooting skills are so good that I have never missed a target. Once, I went hunting with my brother. He fired a shot at a bear and managed to injure it. I wasn't paying attention when the bear suddenly pounced in front of me. Quickly, I picked up the rifle, pointed it at the bear's head and fired a shot. The bear died but my rifle was also damaged."

The Female Engineer's Undertaking

Heading south after leaving Genhe, we entered the Yakeshi Forest Region.

I had made a special trip to the Daxinganling tunnel. On the train ride from Beijing to Hailar, I had already noticed the winding tunnel on the mountain ridges. This was an important station in the early years when the Middle East Railway was being built and also an important military stronghold during the Japanese occupation.

Our driver told me that, nearby, there was also a memorial to commemorate a female engineer.

I stopped to have a look for the memorial. The hill was densely covered with pine trees. If no one had told me about the memorial, I would never have noticed it. I walked around for a while before I finally found a small path leading to the memorial. After much effort, I managed to climb up. The memorial was actually a nameless monument consisting of a pile of stones. But hidden behind it was a touching story.

The construction of the Middle East Railway at this stretch started in 1901. In December 1903, when the deadline for its completion was nearing, the Daxinganling tunnel had yet to be opened. The engineer in charge of the construction project was a Russian lady, Sally. Even though she had tried her best, she was unable to complete the project in time. Feeling guilty and blaming herself for the delay, Sally committed suicide. Her spirit touched the rest of the crew, who worked hard to ensure that the tunnel would open on time.

Sally died almost 100 years ago. Today, the region is no

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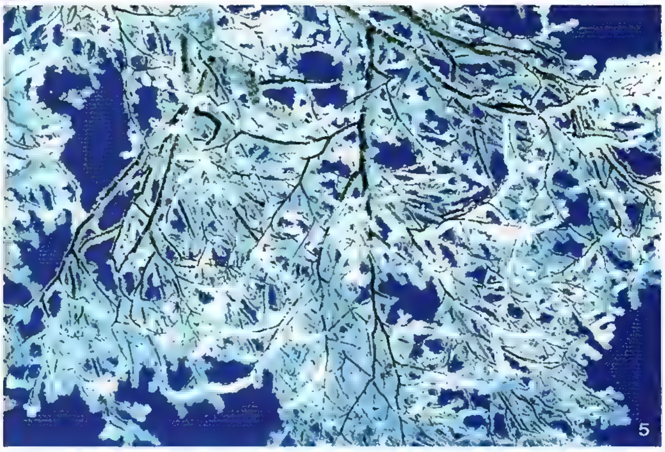
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longer as desolate as it was in those days. Flocks of sheep often appear on the hills. East of the tunnel is Boketu Town and to the west, Wunuoer Town. There are also the frequent trains passing through the tunnel....

Jumping with Excitement at the Sight of Icicles

I certainly did not expect Wuerqihan Primitive Forest to be so beautiful.

Departing from Yakeshi, we arrived first at Meitian Town before we entered the forest. Along the 30-km snow-covered road, our driver drove carefully. Quite often, big trucks with loads of wood sped towards past. Continuing with our journey, an unexpected sight awaited. Under the morning light, we saw beautiful icicles among the pine and birch forests. We were so excited that we couldn't help running around, playing in the snow and taking pictures of the beautiful scene.

Standing in the forest, we realised that it wasn't easy trying to get a good shot. We couldn't find a tall spot where we could snap a panoramic view. A good part of the beautiful scenery was also hidden behind the hills. When I went into the birch forest, I gave a good kick to one of the trees and a pile of snowflakes promptly fell all over me. Covered all over with snow, I looked just like Santa Claus.

Our driver suggested that we visit Lamashan, a unique stone forest. When we left the forest, the snow diminished and the air clearly felt warmer. We finally arrived at Balin Town, and Lamashan scenic spot was just nearby. Within the scenic spot, there are a total of 28 stone peaks of various sizes. From afar, the main peak resembles a lama meditating facing the wall — hence the name. The rocks on the hill assume many different shapes.

1. The train speeds along the snow covered tracks.

2~5. The dazzling snow scenes and glittering icicles of the forest make for good pictures.

6. Even before the sun had set, the moon rose above the Jilalin hills. (by Sun Jing)

A Word from the Author

Out of all the places in China I have visited, I love Inner Mongolia the most, and Hulunbuir is the place I have visited most in Inner Mongolia.

The first time I went, I had so much fun that I totally forgot my age. Looking back, the adventures we had were hilarious — stealing a boat one misty morning and drifting aimlessly along the Huhenuoer; taking a tractor all the way to Lake Beier and having to stay in a small inn for days because there was no transport back; experiencing the bustling night life in Manchuria and getting drunk in the bars; getting all wet, and wild surfing in the rapid rivers of Aoluguya Forest, wrecking my camera in the process....

Last winter, I chose to visit Hulunbuir once again. However, having lived more than half a century, I had doubts as to whether my old body was able to withstand the frigid cold. After much contemplation, I took a brave step and got on the train. On the way, I called my editor and reported to him the latest information — the temperature in Hulunbuir had gone down to as low as -41°C. Expecting him to show some concern about my wellbeing, I was stunned when he said excitedly, "Minus 41°C? That's great! You can writer a story about your experiences at -41°C...."

"Don't worry, the camera will work."

"It's okay, just do your job."

With the cold winter wind blowing through my down jacket and the breaking down of both my cameras, the only thing spurring me to move on was the beautiful scenery outside.

The winter is here again. I feel like visiting Hulunbuir....

Travel Information

The ice sculpture in front of the Manchuria Bus Station

Climate:

Winter in Hulunbuir is long and cold, reaching temperatures as low as - 40°C. It is pleasantly cool during the short summer, windy and dry during spring, with plummeting temperatures and early frost during autumn. The average temperature is between -5°C to 2°C, with the most rainfall between July and August.

Peak Travel Periods:

The best time to travel to Hulunbuir during winter is from November to mid-February and during summer, from mid-May to mid-September.

This year, the opening ceremony for the winter festival will be held in Yakeshi and the festival will end in March. The Winter Nadamu Festival should be held sometime in late December.

Getting there:

There are five flights from Beijing to Hulunbuir every week. Tickets are priced between 700 - 990 yuan*.

The flights details for flights from Hailar to Beijing are as follows:

Mondays, Thursdays & Sundays:
Departure from Hailar: 1050 hours
Arrival at Beijing: 1240 hours
Aircraft: B737

Tuesdays & Fridays:
Departure from Hailar: 1800 hours
Arrival at Beijing: 2000 hours
Aircraft: B737

There are trains from Beijing direct to Hailar. You can take the 193 Express from the Beijing Beizhan Station. The train will travel along the Inner Mongolia Grasslands and pass tourist spots such as Chifeng. However, during peak periods, tickets are usually sold out fast. Or you could take the 301, which passes through the three provinces in Dongbei and terminates at Manchuria.

Itinerary:

Hailar → Manchuria → Heishantou → Labudalin → Enhe → Jilalin → Moerdaoga → Genhe → Yakeshi

Hailar

Hailar is the capital of Hulunbuir. The tourist attractions here are the Genghis Khan Square, the ruins of the Japanese military strongholds and the Hailar National Forest Park. Hailar is also very near other tourists spot such as Bayinhushuo, Huhenuoer and Jinzhanghan (due to the frigid cold in winter, these tourist spots are closed).

Accommodation:

Hulunbuir Hotel ★★★
Standard room — 220 yuan
Tel: (0470) 822 2212
Address: No. 2, Shengli Street, Hailar City

Buir Hotel ★★
Standard room — 220 yuan
Tel: (0470) 833 2511
Address: No. 36, Zhongyang Road, Hailar City

Others accommodation:

The Youyi Guesthouse, Beiyuan Hotel, Laodong Mansion, Youyi Hotel and Huifeng Hotel all provide good conditions and amenities.

There are also other smaller, inexpensive hotels and guesthouses that charge around 20 yuan/single bed. The living and sanitation conditions are average.

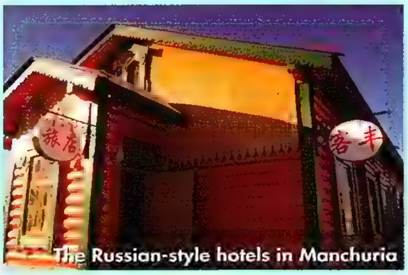
Manchuria

Manchuria is the largest port city in Northern China. Its main tourist attractions are: Lake Dalai, Lake Erzi, and the ruins of Liao Dynasty's ancient city.

Getting there:

By road: There is a coach departing from Hailar to Manchuria every 30 minutes. Tickets are priced at 25.5 yuan. The road conditions are good and the journey takes about three hours.

By railway: There are six scheduled trains from Hailar to Manchuria everyday. The journey takes about four hours.



The Russian-style hotels in Manchuria

Accommodation:

Xinyuan Hotel ★★★
Standard room — 288 yuan
Tel: (0470) 624 9333
Address: No. 4, Sandao Street, Manchuria

International Hotel ★★★
Standard room — 430 yuan
Tel: (0470) 622 2225
Address: Erdao Street, Manchuria

Other accommodation:

The Mingzhu Hotel, Jinding Mansion, Zhonglu Mansion, Jinfeng Hotel and Dongfang Mingzhu Mongolia City all provide good conditions and amenities.

There are also various smaller hotels that charge around 15 yuan/single bed.

Touring Tips:

You can make arrangements to travel to Russia in Manchuria. The procedures are so simple that you can set off the very next day (Hong Kong Residents may also apply).

Yierkucike and Lake Baikal 8-Day Tour: 5,200 yuan (includes passport administrative fee);

Wulanwude 6-Day Tour: 4,600 yuan (includes passport administrative fee);

Chita 4-Day Tour: 2,200 yuan (includes passport administrative fee);

Moscow, St. Petersburg 11-Day Tour: 12,000 yuan (includes passport administrative fee);

Hongshi 3-Day Tour: 1,600 yuan (includes passport administrative fee);

Contact Numbers: Manchuria China International Travel Agency: (0470) 622 2988; Manchuria Port International Travel Agency: (0470) 622 5731

Heishantou

A town under the jurisdiction of Eerguna City, Heishantou is also one of the China-Russian trading ports. The Heishantou ancient city was where Genghis Khan's brother, Jochi, built his manor. It is classified as a national protected historical and cultural relic.

Getting there:

There is a bus departing from Labudalin to Heishantou every morning at 10: 00 am. Tickets are priced at 12 yuan.

Accommodation:

Small hotels charge around 10 yuan/single bed.

Labudalin

Home to the Eerguna Municipal, Labudalin exudes an air of Russian charm. The Russians are one of the minority groups in China. Their traditional Basque Festival has become one of the main tourist attractions of Eerguna.

Getting there:

By road: From the Hailar long-distance Bus Stop, there are buses departing for Labudalin every 30 minutes. Tickets are priced at 22.5 yuan.

The taxi in Labudalin City costs around five yuan. There are no public buses.

Walking in the Manchuria City gives a strong feeling of being in a foreign land

Accommodation:

Yaou Hotel: Standard room — 240 yuan

Liangmao Hotel: Double room — 80 yuan

Other smaller hotels charge around 15 yuan/single bed. Facilities are average.

Enhe

Most of the residents are Russians. Life here is simple and the air is very fresh. A good place to escape from the summer heat.

Getting there:

There are three scheduled buses shuttling between Labudalin and

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*US $1 ~ 8 yuan

Enhe. Tickets are priced at 17 yuan. Coaches from Labudalin to Jilalin also pass through Enhe.

Accommodation:

Penglai Hotel: 12 yuan/single bed
There are also other hotels providing accommodation at similar prices. Living and sanitary conditions are good. You may also choose to stay with one of the Chinese-Russian families.

Jilalin

Also known as Shiwei, this is a typical border village situated on the banks of the Eerguna Boundary River. It is now home to the Russian tribes. The government, in a bid to promote tourism, has allocated funds to 10 families of Chinese-Russian descent and established the "Family Tour" to host tourists. Tourists can stay with the families, taste their Russian cuisine and visit the boundary river.

Getting there:

There is a bus departing from Labudalin to Jilalin every morning. Tickets are priced at 30 yuan.

Accommodation:

Daluqiao Villa: 30 yuan/single bed
Family Hotel: 10 - 20 yuan/single bed

The mouth-watering western cuisine prepared by the Chinese-Russian family

Moerdaoga

The first national forest park in Daxinganling, Inner Mongolia, it covers a total area of 578,000 ha. Its main tourist attractions are the Daxinganling Nature Park, the camphor pine primitive forest, and the Bailudao Villa.

Getting there:

By road: Moerdaoga is around 210 km from Labudalin. An early bus departs at 8 am. Tickets are priced at 40 yuan.

By railway: Moerdaoga is around 300 km from Hailar. There are trains from Hailar and Yakeshi direct to Moerdaoga. From Hailar, a cabin ticket costs 80 yuan.

Accommodation:

Longyan Villa: Standard room — 120 yuan
Shanquan Hotel: Standard room — 80 yuan
Other small hotels charge 10 - 20 yuan/single bed.

Genhe

This is a region with beautiful forest scenery. In the west is a new Aoluguya Ewenki Village. A small group of hunters here still rear reindeers. The main tourist attractions are the Aoluguya National Nature Hunting Village, Ewenki Village, Traditional Customs Museum, and the Lumingshan Scenic Spot.

A Mongolian Cairn on top of a hill in Jinzhonghan

Getting there:

From the Labudalin Station, the bus departs at 9:30 am.

From Hailar Station, the earliest bus departs at 7:40 am, and then at intervals of one hour.

Accommodation:

Genhe City Hotel:
Standard room — 240 yuan
Forest Industry Guesthouse — 60 - 100 yuan

There are also many other smaller and inexpensive hotels that charge around 20 yuan/single bed. Living and sanitary conditions are average.

Yakeshi

Situated in the north of Daxinganling, in the centre of Hulunbuir, it is also known as the City of Forests. Its main attractions are the Phoenix Villa and Lama Shan. The scenery in winter is beautiful.

Getting there:

By railway: There are six scheduled trains from Hailar to Yakeshi every day. The journey takes about two hours and tickets are priced at around 10 yuan.

By road: There are buses departing from Hailar to Yakeshi every 30 minutes. The journey takes about two hours and tickets are priced at around 12 yuan.

Accommodation:

Lincheng Hotel, Yakeshi Hotel, Liming Hotel: Living conditions and amenities are good. Room rates are 40 yuan/person. There are also other smaller hotels that charge around 15 yuan/person.

Phoenix Villa

Situated in the southeastern part of Yakeshi and 87 km from Hailar, the main activity here in winter is skiing. Snowfall here can last for up to five months. The ski fields occupy 2,500 ha. It has undulating ski runs meandering through the pine and birch forests. The starting and ending points are on flat terrain, which makes it suitable for ski beginners.

Getting there:

Take a cab from Yakeshi city. The journey takes about 10 minutes and costs around 30 yuan.

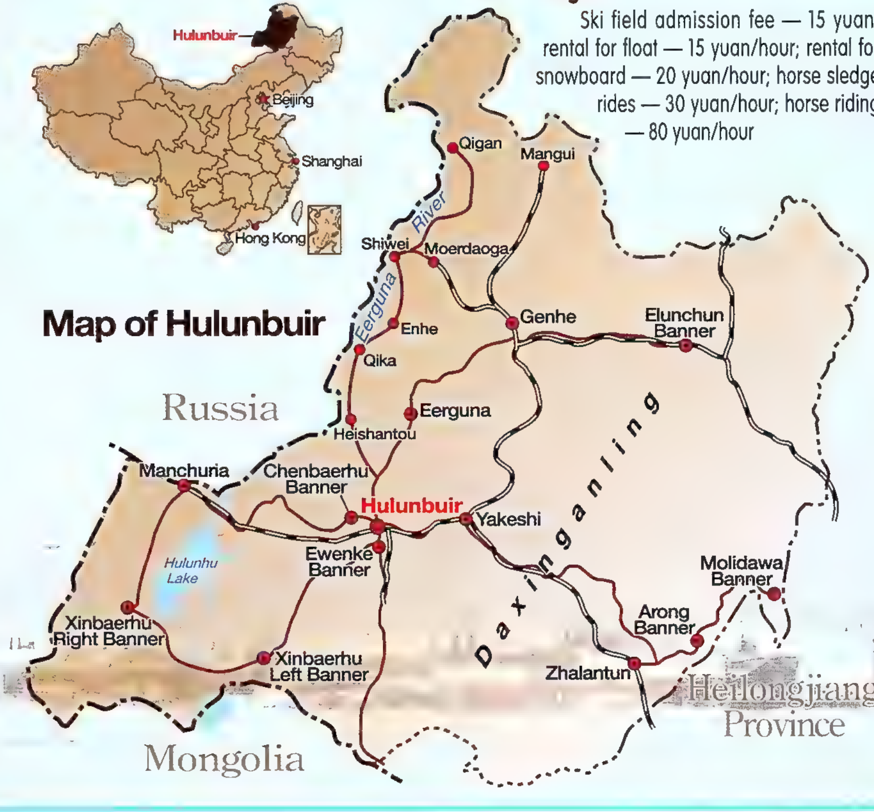
Accommodation:

Phoenix Villa: Standard room — 80 - 160 yuan

The morning sun brings a ray of life into the forest

Charges:

Ski field admission fee — 15 yuan; rental for float — 15 yuan/hour; rental for snowboard — 20 yuan/hour; horse sledge rides — 30 yuan/hour; horse riding — 80 yuan/hour



Flying Like Apsaras in the Sky of Dunhuang

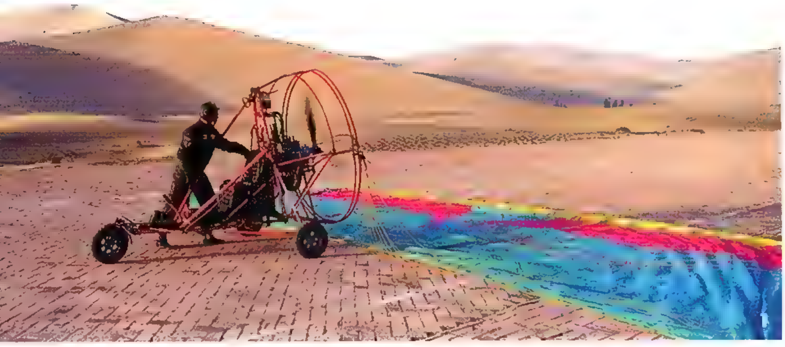
photos by Wang Jin   Article by Wang Jin and Zhang Liping

In Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes, I saw frescoes of Apsaras flying in the blue sky. Holding flowers in their hands, they appeared carefree and romantic.

Little did I know that one day, I too would be able to fly among the clouds and look down on Dunhuang from the air, like the Apsaras. It was an unforgettable experience.

On October 1, 2004, the Apsaras Tour, a program sponsored by Jiayuguan TV Station, set off from Jiayuguan, to fly over the Great Wall to the edge of Lop Nur. During the eight-day journey covering 1,500 km, we shot various scenes from a microlight, including the Yueya (Crescent) Spring, Dunhuang National Geopark for Yardan Formations, the Mogao

1. **The author taking photos of the Yardan landforms from the microlight.**
2. **Yardan National Geopark is a new tourist attraction opened recently in Dunhuang City. With its wind-eroded landforms covering more than 2,600 km², the park on the eastern edge of Lop Nur is just a small part.**



Grottoes, Yumenguan Pass, Yangguan Pass, Hecang City, and Anxi's Suoyang City.

October 1 Humming Sand Hill and Cresent Spring

At 9 a.m. on October 1, we loaded up the trucks for our trip west. The microlight looked like a giant bird ready to take off.

During the 400 km journey, we saw the Gobi desert dotted with signal towers and ancient fortresses. We arrived at Dunhuang at 6 p.m. intending to rest before shooting the Yardan landforms the next morning. The azure sky of Dunhuang, however, made us change our plan. We decided to go directly to Mingsha (Humming Sand) Hill and Yueya (Crescent) Spring.

Mingsha Hill is five kilometres south of Dunhuang. It is formed from moving sand, producing a humming sound that gives the area its name. On sunny days, even when there is no wind, the dunes make musical sounds, forming one of the 10 major attractions in Dunhuang.

We inspected the runway and found it was ready for use. Yang Hua, our pilot, soon had the microlight ready to go. With a deafening roar, the big bird flew into the blue sky. Looking down from the air, I saw the magnificent wave-like dunes, embracing the Yueya Spring, shaped like a new moon. I kept pressing the shutter, hoping to preserve the scene forever.

October 2 Imposing Yardan Landforms

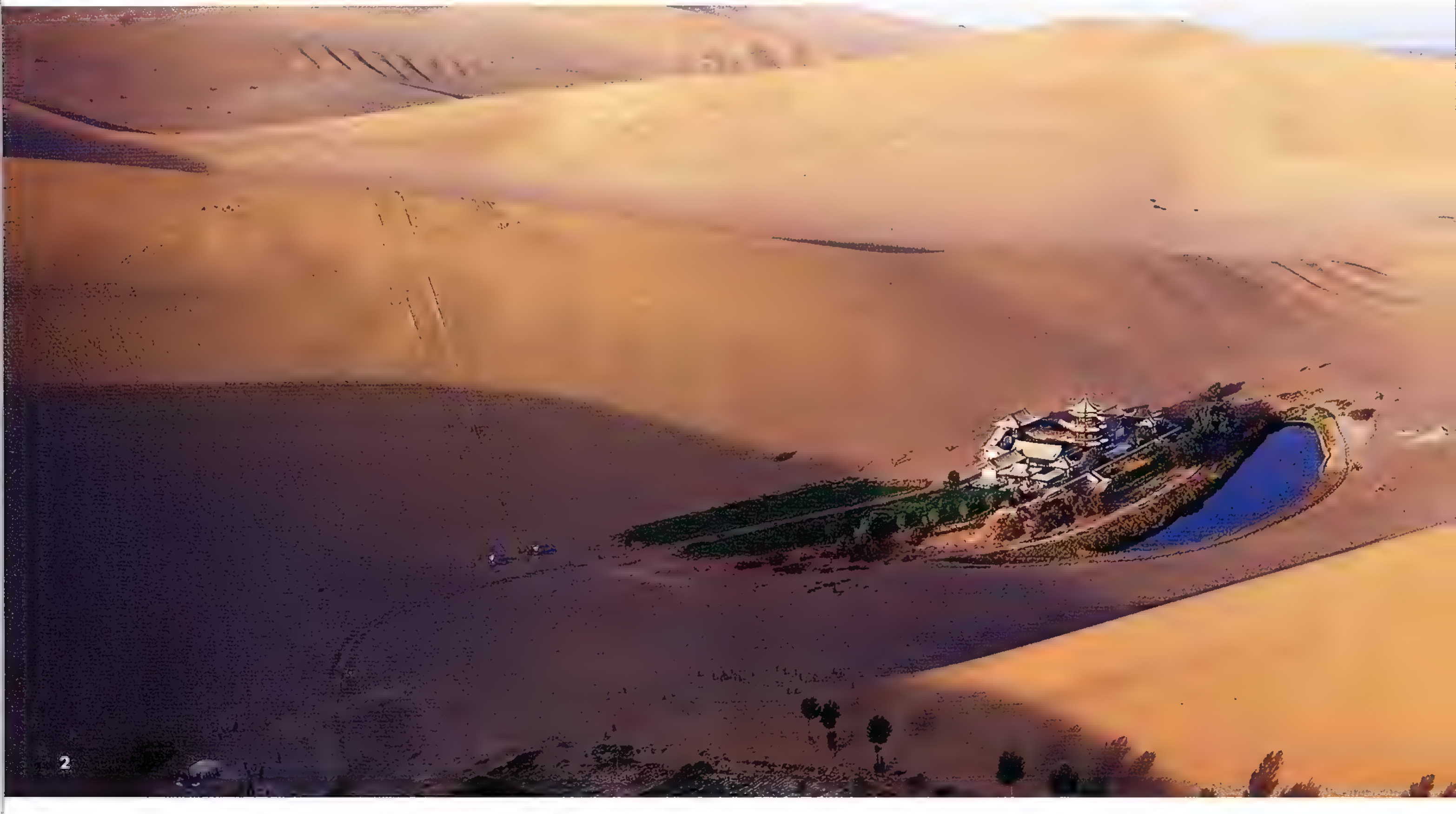
We moved on to photograph the Yardan formations the next day.

Yardan is the general term for landforms that result from wind erosion. In Uygur, it means "steep earth hills". In the 1820s, Svan Herdin, a Swede, and Stein, a Brit, toured China's west. They termed the unique landforms they had found in Dunhuang "Yardan".

In the past, few people came to this area, because of the challenging journey to cross the vast Gobi. Today, the area is a national geopark open to the public.

We arrived at the Yardan area at 5 p.m. In the endless Gobi desert, there were various formations created by the wind. Some looked like ships sailing the sea, and others like ancient fortresses. Some seemed like a divine tortoise swimming across the straits, while others resembled a peacock or a woman's dress.

We set up camp in the centre of the area. Some of the



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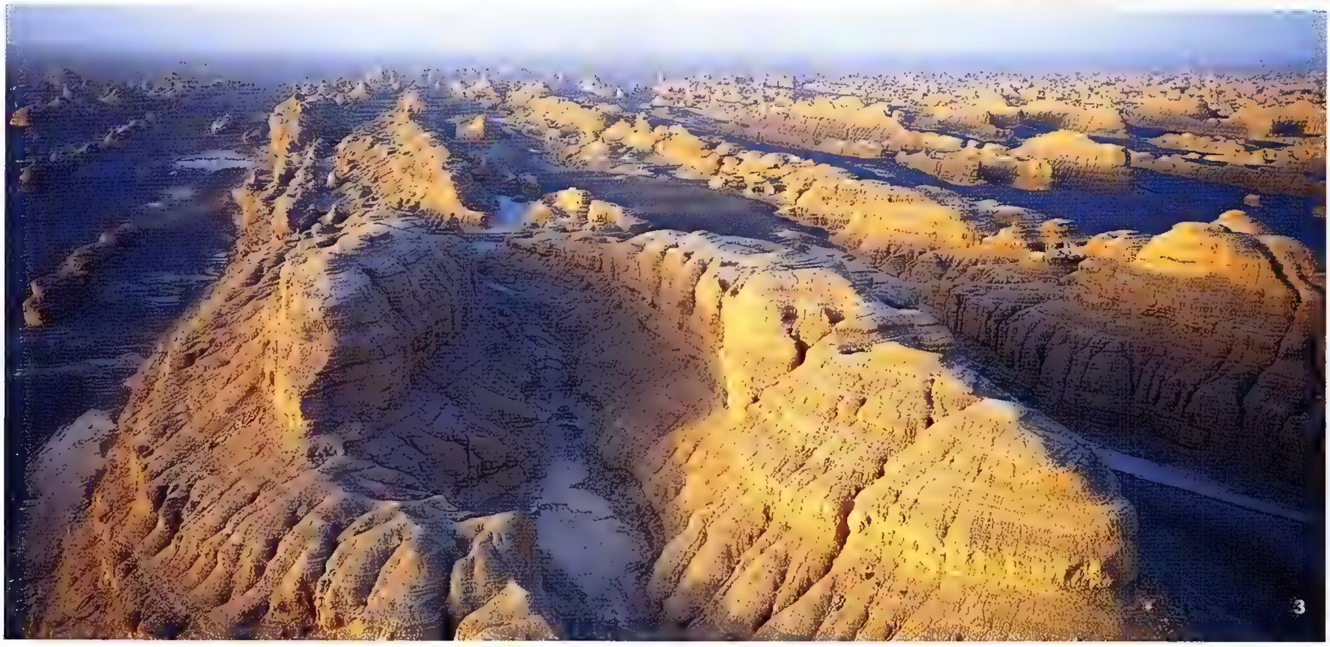
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team began preparing their cameras while others set up camp.

About an hour later, we sat down for dinner. Someone from Lanzhou opened a bottle of brandy, definitely a luxury on the edge of the "sea of death".

Night fell and we saw the huge dome of the dark sky above us. Never in my life had I ever seen so many stars shining so bright. I had seen nights in the Gobi, in other deserts, or in the mountains, but it was the first time I had ever seen such a beautiful night among the Yardan formations.

When the geopark staff learned we were to stay out overnight, they insisted we sleep in their underground dwellings, warning of the terrible night cold. They also advised us to turn our vehicles, to avoid a wind that could strip off the paint.

So we moved underground, settling on the floor or on sofas, hoping for a sound sleep. As I was dozing off, someone cried out. A rat had jumped onto his neck. A few others became so frightened that they screamed now and then in the darkness. Perhaps because they seldom saw people, the rats here were not at all afraid of us. Instead, they jumped here and there, disturbing us for the whole night. Late at night, it was so cold I still could not warm up, even covered with two long coats. I had to shiver until daybreak.

October 3-6 With the Rats in the Wild Desert

A loud motor noise woke me up. When I walked out, I saw that it was already dawn and Yang Hua was preparing to take off.

The sky was dark gray, it was windy and the visibility was very low. This was what we had worried about. Fine days in the Yardan area are few and far between.

After we took some photos from the air, some of the team returned to Dunhuang, leaving eight behind to wait for the sun to come out. But the sun did not show its face, so we sat around playing cards in the daytime, counting the stars in the evening, and sleeping with the rats at night. Four days

1. **Getting ready to take aerial photos of the Mingsha Hill**
2. **Yueya Spring is surrounded by shifting sand dunes. It forms another tourist attraction together with the Mingsha Hill.**
3. **The various Yardan formations**

passed and it was not until the afternoon of our sixth day that the weather improved. We got our shots and left the next morning.

October 7 Flying above the Mogao Grottoes

The Mogao Grottoes house one of the world's cultural troves, attracting tourists from around the world, making Dunhuang a widely known city.

The grottoes, also known as the Thousand Buddha Caves, are located 25 km southeast of Dunhuang, on the eastern cliffs of the Mingsha Hill. They form the largest cultural treasure house in China, preserving unique Buddhist art works. The 492 caves, dug over 1,000 years, contain art works from 10 dynasties, including more than 2,400 coloured sculptures and frescos.

We arrived on the morning of October 7, ready for aerial photography. Usually, flying is absolutely forbidden above the grottoes, because the area is a World Cultural Heritage site, and under strict protective control.

Viewing the caves from the microlight, I seemed to hear mysterious music and imagined I saw flowers falling from the sky. It felt as if I was dancing with the flying Apsaras, among clouds and flower petals, and with their light garments caressing my face.

October 8 Photographing Ancient Suoyang City

Suoyang, also known as Kuyu, was a border city on the ancient road from Jiuquan to Dunhuang. Legend says that during a western expedition, the Tang army led by Prince Li Zhi, son of Emperor Li Shimin of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), and General Xue Rengei, were surrounded by the Hami army headed by Marshall Su Baotong. When the Tang soldiers had eaten all their food, General Xue found a herb called suoyang growing in the city. He ordered his men to eat the plants, and the army was able to hold out until the arrival of General Cheng Yaojin. The city's name was changed to Suoyang, and it is said that whenever you dig into a sand dune here, you are sure to find the useful plant growing.

The main part of the city is almost square, measuring 470 m from south to north and 430 m from east to west. It has four projective fortresses, which, though no longer in use, remain in good shape with solid loam walls standing nine metres high and five metres wide. The city of Suoyang was our last photography site. The wind was too strong for the microlight the afternoon we were there. It was cloudy too, with only a strip of blue sky on the western horizon. We would be allowed just 15 minutes

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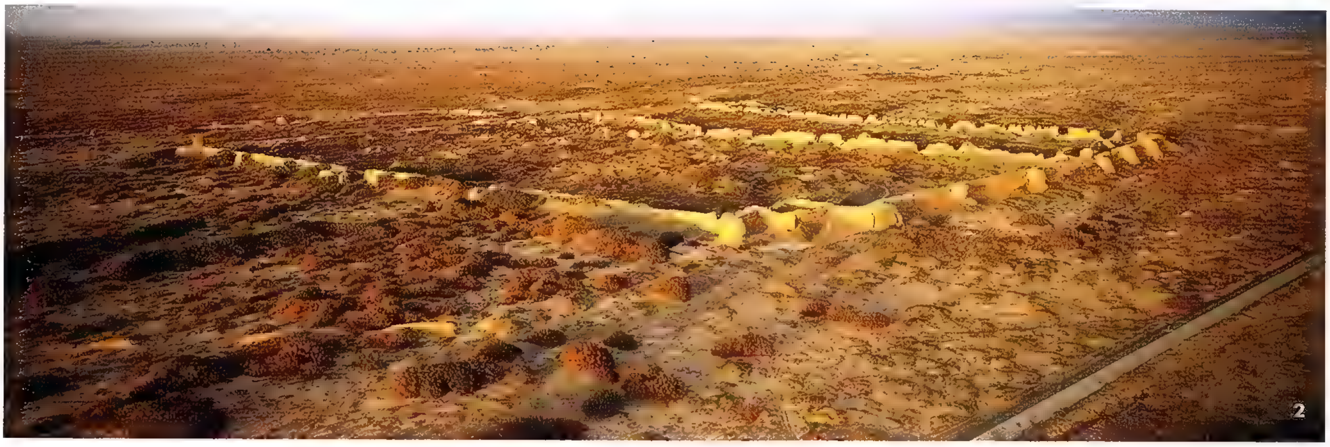
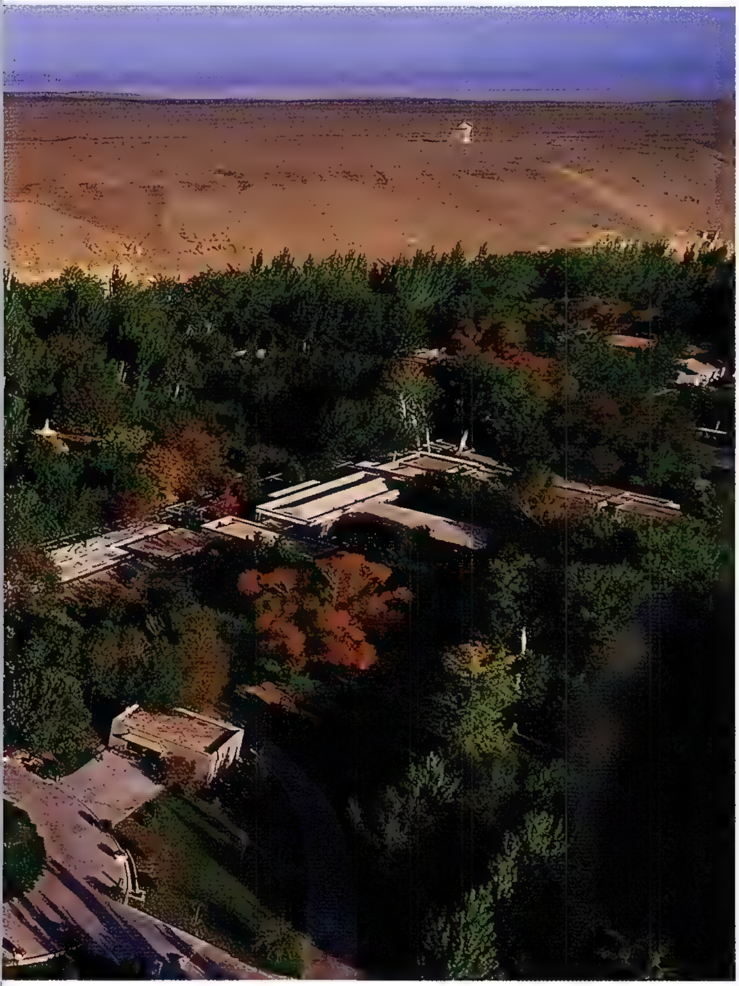


shooting time, if we could take off. We had to try. Our faithful pilot took off despite the danger. High in the air, we saw Suoyang in the desert, like a quiet old man at the end of an uneasy life.

We returned to Jiyuguan that night, ending the eight-day trip. The journey, with all of its uncomfortable and dangerous moments, mixed in with the thrill of the desert night, and the wonderful new sights, still remains fresh in my memory. It was a trip I will never forget.



1. **The oldest cave of the Mogao Grottoes, dug in 366 of the Qin Dynasty, has a history of over 1,600 years.**
2. **The fantastic Suoyang City**

Travel Tips

Transport: Dunhuang is reachable from many Chinese cities by air, including Beijing, Lanzhou and Urumqi. To go by train, one should get down at the station of Dunhuang, which was formerly called Liuyuan and then take a bus to the city situated 130 km away.

Entry tickets:

Mingsha Hill and Yueya Spring: 80 yuan*;
Mogao Grottoes: 100 yuan;
Yangguan Pass: 40 yuan;
Yumenyuan Pass: 30 yuan;
National Geopark: 40 yuan (taxi in the scenic area: 30 yuan).

Climate: It is usually dry. The average temperature in January is 9°C, and that of July is 24.7°C, with big differences between the morning and evening temperatures. Remember to bring suitable clothes.

Accommodation:

Dunhuang ★★★

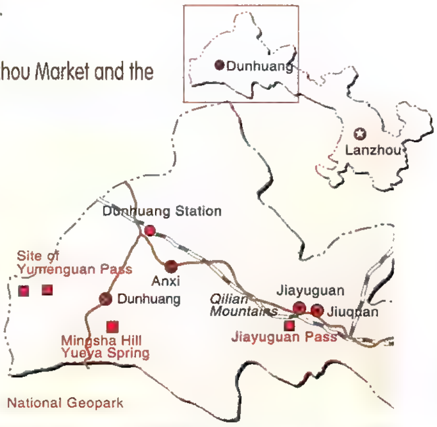
Character: Situated at the foot of the Mingsha Hill, it shows architectural styles of the various dynasties of Han, Tang, Ming and Qing.
Add: Dunyue Road, Dunhuang, Gansu Province; Tel: (0937) 888 2088;
Rate: 540 yuan/standard room.

Dunhuang International Hotel ★★★

Character: Situated in downtown of Dunhuang, it has convenient transport.
Add: 28 Mingshan Road, Dunhuang, Gansu Province; Tel: (0937) 882 8638;
Rate: 298 yuan/standard room.

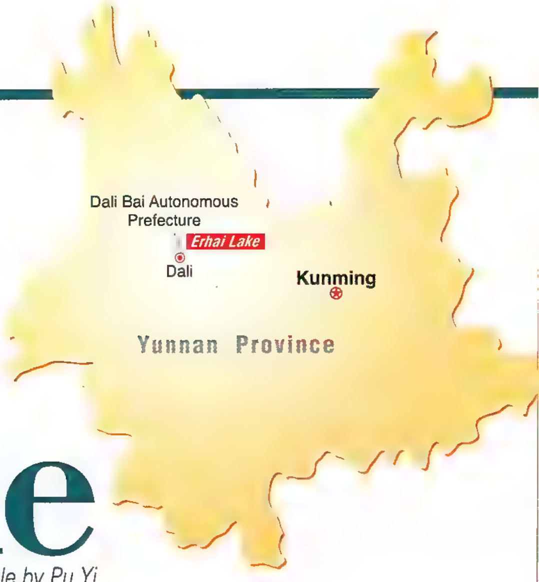
Taiyang (Sun) Hotel ★★★

Character: Situated by the Shazhou Market and the city's commercial street, it's convenient for shopping.
Add: 5 Shazhou Road North, Dunhuang; Tel: (0937) 882 9998.
Rate: 288 yuan/three-star standard room in Building No. 1 and No. 2; 478 yuan/standard room in Building No. 3.



* US $ 1 ~ 8 yuan

My Fisherman's Life at Erhai Lake



Photos by Ou Yansheng Article by Pu Yi

Erhai Lake in Dali is the second largest altiplano freshwater lake in Yunnan. The fishing families who have lived here for generations are as intimate with the lake as the ospreys. Yang Liujin has been fishing here for dozens of years. His family mirrors the changes of Erhai Lake.

I am a native of Yunnan, a place where it boasts many mountains but lacks water. Like many other people from this mountainous region, I have a yearning for the sea. Although Erhai Lake has nothing to do with the sea, nobody feels strange about calling it that ("hai" means "sea" in Chinese).

For thousands of years, Erhai Lake has been the bright pearl of the northwest of Yunnan. If Dali is a beautiful woman, then Erhai Lake is her sparkling eye, which fascinates and charms. From a bird's eye view, Erhai Lake, also called Kunming Lake, is like the ear ("er" in Chinese), hence its name. Originating from Eryuan County, Erhai Lake is situated on the watershed belt of the Lantsang, Jinsha and Yuanjiang Rivers. The lake covers an area of 326.66 m^2 and it is the second altiplano freshwater lake of Yunnan.

The water quality of the lake is the best of the nine altiplano lakes of Yunnan. Erhai Lake still benefits 200,000 residents of the 11 villages and towns surrounding it. Most of them make a living by fishing in the lake and farming. To them, Erhai Lake is their mother.

I stayed overnight on the fishing boat of Yang Liujin. The fisherman tidied up the cabin and set me down to rest near the kitchen range, while the couple slept in the other little cabin, separated from me by just a bamboo curtain. This is their bedroom on the boat, which allows them room to lie down, but not fully straighten their legs. According to Yang, the couple stays there for at least eight months every year. They still have a pretty brick house in Shacun Village, but the house is just a hotel for them. When they are too tired, they relax for a few days there, and also welcome guests. I am the only one who has insisted on staying on the boat though.

When I awoke at midnight, I crawled out of the cabin. The calm water of the day had become rough. The lake completely revealed its wildness in the boundless night.

Treating an Osprey Like a Son

Yang Liujin and his wife were both born in the early 1950s. By chance they both weighed three kilograms (liu jin) at birth, hence the Liu character in their names. His real name, Yang Dingheng, meaning "very gentle" is not usually used. The family is well known for its long history of fishing down the generations. Yang Liujin became a fisherman just after he finished his study at elementary school at the age of 13. His wife became a pious Buddhist and changed her name to Zhang Sijie, after she had a dream that the fourth daughter of the Heavenly Emperor showed her presence in her body.

Fishing with ospreys is now becoming very rare around the lake. Many years ago quite a few families around Erhai Lake kept ospreys. However, the number is decreasing, for the osprey is becoming more rare and it costs more to train the ospreys too. There is also the problem of fewer fish in the lake. There are only two families out of over 1,000 families who still keep ospreys in Shacun Village, and about 30 such families in the entire Erhai Lake area.

There are over 20 ospreys in the family of Yang Liujin. Every year, a few outlanders are attracted to his home by the well-trained ospreys. Yang always feels grieved to sell an osprey because it is like family to him. But he has to, because he cannot afford so many ospreys and wants them to be used for fishing. According to Yang, his feeling for the osprey is based on the 3,000

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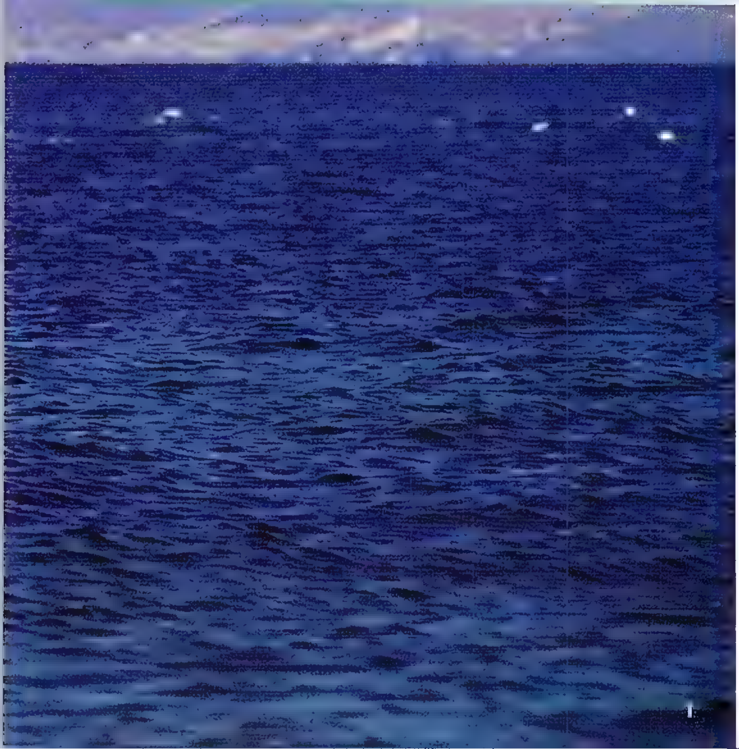
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1. Erhai Lake nurtures thousands of fishing families.
2. The Old Yang family takes the lake as its home and lives with the ospreys all the year.
3. Old Yang's family has raised ospreys for generations.

years of osprey keeping in his family. The ospreys have helped support the family for generations. He has even moved into a spacious and bright brick house with a courtyard. Yang gives every osprey a name, like Wadezi and Qiguozi. The moment Yang calls and feeds the ospreys, I have a feeling that he is calling his children. With Yang, the fierce osprey becomes tame.

An Intelligent Bird

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I told Yang that when I was in Guilin City, people beside the Lijiang River treated the osprey as a toy. Tourists could handle it at will and take pictures with it. One even got drunk and gave beer to the osprey, which also got drunk soon. The honest fisherman became angry and mumbled, "What an evil! The osprey is an intelligent and sentient being. If you treat it kindly, it will venture its life for fishing. How could it be used as a toy!"

In 1999 I made friends with Yang Liujin. I stayed in his home at the beginning of the next spring. Every morning the family gets up early to go fishing. Since her marriage into the family at the age of 19, Zhang Sijie has made a living at the lake with her husband. They have one son and three daughters, who are all grown up, and the two elder daughters are married. After the son married, Yang bought an aluminum boat for the young couple for fishing.

Every morning Yang gets up before the ospreys awake. Their hut is just over 10 m from the boat. It seems that the ospreys enjoy the humble hut made from worn fishnet and some wood blocks, wire and felt. At night they swagger into the roomy hut and fall sound asleep with their head on their wing.

When Yang comes to the quiet hut, he peers through the fishnet, finding the sleepy ospreys have not yet drawn out their heads from under their wings, while the sun is peeking into the hut. Yang picks up a stick reluctantly and knocks on the blocks. Immediately the ospreys awaken and shoot up their heads, peering around. Having seen Yang, they bustle into the sunshine one after another, opening up their wings to Yang. Though Yang has clipped their wings to stop them from flying away, some of the birds still fan their wings and fly awkwardly about five feet into the air.

Receiving Training Like Students

Some of the ospreys are new to the training. Yang calls their names to gather them together, fastens their legs with strings, and trains them together with the other experienced ospreys. It is necessary to keep on training the ospreys, and the repeating practice keeps them alert. The osprey is just like Yang's student who needs instruction, and the people around all regard him as the schoolmaster. Yang trains the ospreys using the dialect of the Baizu ethnic group. Under his command, the ospreys like soldiers gather together and separate, shoot into the water and spring out. According to Yang, these ospreys have received training since birth. When they are young he mainly trains them by stroking

Osprey Facts

The scientific name of the osprey is cormorant, a water bird. They like to live by lakes, reservoirs, pools, fishponds, outfalls and bays. The osprey can swim and is good at fishing; the skin below its throat can extend and becomes a chamber to store fish. After domestication, the osprey can be trained to fish for humans. The major place for raising osprey is the south of China, such as Guangxi, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Hunan.

The eyesight of the osprey decreases greatly in dirty water and the bird has vanished in some places because the water quality is polluted. Erhai Lake in Dali, Yunnan is still a main centre of osprey raising.

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and teaching them to memorise their names. When they are about seven or eight months old and have their feathers grown, the normal training begins. Usually the little ospreys are trained together with the older ones so that they can learn from their elders and master their work swiftly.

"The osprey is more intelligent than any other animal, even the dog." Yang once told me that the osprey could swim when it is two or three months old. It begins to learn fishing after seven or eight months and can do the job independently at the age of two or three. The prime is from four to eight years old, when the osprey can plunge into dozens of metres of deep water if it comes across a shoal of fish.

At about eight or nine o'clock in the morning the family sets out to go fishing after breakfast. The older couple and the young couple occupy one boat with dozens of ospreys on the sides, standing shoulder to shoulder. The ospreys clasp the sides of the boat closely with their four talons. The black toe web helps them grasp things firmly and becomes the vigorous oar for swift swimming in the water. The boat leisurely sails to the centre of the lake and the ospreys stand steadily on the sides with their sharp eyes piercing through like cold light.

Tying the Knot before Fishing

Zhang Sijie rows the boat, while Yang Liujin rings the ospreys' necks with straw and gently ties the knot to stop the hungry birds swallowing the fish. When the knot is done, Yang drives them into the water. The ospreys are quite intimate with the water and begin frisking straight away. Some plunge into the water and put in an appearance after over a minute; some fan their wings in the water, spattering spray far and near; some naughty ospreys even dive under water for quite a while, and in the centre of the playing, turn up with a fish in their mouth.

The feather of the osprey is not water-repellent, which is good for diving. Since the watery feather weights the body, the heavier the body, the deeper it can dive. Its sharp eyesight helps it see things underwater.

Yang looks at them lovingly and kindly. These ospreys have just renewed their feathers. The eye turns to emerald green from brown; the feathers shine dark and dazzlingly white in contrast. It is the best time of the year for the osprey.

As the boat sails to the centre of the lake, a shoal appears and disappears now and then. Yang orders the young ospreys over the side, letting them see how the experienced ospreys catch fish. Then he picks up a bamboo stick and beats the boat sides and whips the water, giving the ospreys the message it is time to start fishing. As the beating gets louder and louder, the ospreys rush to the water one after another. Several minutes later, the ospreys swim back to the boat with their mouths crammed with fish. Yang grabs the neck, letting the bird vomit the fish into the crate and return to the water. In half an hour, almost every osprey has caught some and the crate is completely full.

Rewarding the Diligent and Punishing the Lazy

During work, some ospreys may be quite diligent but others are lazy. The diligent ones catch several fish, while the lazy get nothing. So Yang rewards the diligent and

1. **Old Yang always rewards the osprey with small fish after a successful catch.**
2. **When the osprey is fully fledged, its brown-and-yellow eyes turn to green, the feathers on the head turn white and the yellow cheeks become bright; it is the most beautiful moment for the osprey.**
3. **After a struggle, the osprey catches a big fish of more than one kilogram.**
4. **Old Yang treats the osprey as if they were his own children.**

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punishes the lazy. After fishing, he will feed the ospreys with small fish. The diligent ones get fed first. Usually the osprey is fed half full, which allows it to keep fishing. After having a rest for a while, they go on with the work.

The osprey is fully-grown when it is two or three years old. The mouth of the grown-up can hold half a kilogram of fish. If the fish are small, the long neck can hold over 10 fish. When encountering a big fish, ospreys will work together. More than ten birds trap the fish close to the boat so that the master can capture it. At that time Yang is happiest, and the reward is the most generous.

Sometimes if the fishing is good in the morning, Yang will return for lunch at about one or two o'clock in the afternoon and prepares some fish for the birds. The osprey has a good appetite. One osprey will eat one to one-and-a half kilograms each day. The osprey that eats well will grow up quickly. It can stand after seven or eight days and be full-fledged after three or four months. After seven months it has reached full size. When it is two years old, the osprey becomes an adult, when it needs to mate. According to Yang, an osprey can generally live to over 20 years old.

Since the time is limited, the lunch is quite simple, usually cold rice with pickles, or cold vermicelli dressed with sauce or pea noodles. After the meal, the family sets out with the ospreys. Even if he takes ospreys, Yang still carries four or five nets. When the boat sails to the deep water and fish are around, Yang throws the nets slowly. Nowadays, since there are not so many fish in the lake, Yang has to rely on the ospreys. During April and May when the fish are abundant, Yang uses the ospreys and nets.

Zhang Sijie always mentions this feat of her family. In April or May of one year, they took ospreys to Shaping, which was the most luxuriant place in Erhai. The moment the ospreys entered the water, they found a big fish. All of the ospreys crowded around and chased it for over 10 m, enclosing the fish beside the boat. People on both the boats made a tremendous effort to carry the fish to the boat. It weighed more than 50 kg, which delighted the family. "Over 10 years ago it was common to catch a haul of several hundred kilograms, but we are lucky to catch about fifty kilograms these days," said Zhang Sijie while rowing.

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Deterioration of the Ecology Lessens Fish Yields

Trying to explain the reduction in fish, Zhang Sijie said the God of Fishing was unhealthy and under a cloud, so he took back the fish. But Yang would have none of it. "You're talking rubbish. That is superstition. There are many reasons and I have seen it for years. The weather is getting warmer, and the water vaporises and the snow on Cangshan Mountain disappears, so the water level drops. A lot of algae in the lake has therefore disappeared so the fish eating algae die away. The vegetation beside the lake has been destroyed. Formerly there were trees here and there. But now the increasing residents beside the lake cut a lot of trees. Thus, there is little groundwater and it affects the water and fish in the lake. And there are too many powerboats in the past years. The diesel oil and gasoline pollute the water." I was surprised by these clear and logical ideas. It is clear that Yang has thought about these problems for quite a long time.

Remembering the practice of keeping fish with cages I saw beside the Erhai Lake years ago, I asked Yang as to whether it affected the lake. He said he believed it was harmful. Years ago farmers around the Erhai Lake and kept fish in net cages like people in other provinces. Soon many net cages were constructed around the lake. People scattered the fry and feeding fodder in the net cages. In the beginning, the fish quickly reproduced and people made good money. But gradually the water inside the net cages turned black and smelly. The fish droppings polluted the water inside the net cages and even the water nearby. Later on, the authorities forbade the practice and banned over 10,000 cages. Since then the water has become clean again.

The water of the Erhai Lake is now as clean as it was over 20 years ago. Some vanished fishes have even reappeared this year. Every time the boat sails to the lake centre, Zhang Sijie scoops up and drinks mouthfuls of water. She told me that the water is no longer fishy and a little sweet.

Fish Caught by Ospreys Sells Best

The family is happiest when returning from fishing. Yang will always feed the ospreys before disembarking them, leaving them to bask in the sunshine, combing their feathers and moving around freely. Zhang Sijie is busy weighing the fish. Usually the couple catch about 50 kg, sometimes no more than 30 kg, but sometimes over 100 kg. Their younger son and his wife catch less, commonly a little over 20 kg. When I was on the scene, his son always scratched his head and got embarrassed.

After weighing the fish, Zhang Sijie and her daughter-in-law carry the fish to the market nearby for sale. Their fish sells best, for everyone knows the fish has been caught by ospreys. People dislike fish from smaller lakes, and prefer Erhai Lake fish. If other fish is about 10 yuan per kilogram, their fish will sell for 15 yuan per kilogram. After selling out, Zhang Sijie buys fingerlings to feed the ospreys. The couple has an income of about 12,000 yuan per year. Subtracting three to four thousand yuan for the little fish, they have about 8,000 yuan left. They also have a piece of land in Shacun Village and hope to lead a comfortable retirement one day.

Grand Sacrifice Ceremony for the Lake

Zhang Sijie is a pious Buddhist. Her life is coloured with various Buddhist ceremonies. Every morning she offers rice and fruit with a candle and incense, and chants sutras. Around Erhai Lake, there are many people like her. They organise a gathering and have a get-together for chanting sutras every month. They also attend a lot of festivals and ceremonies every year.

Every lunar July 23rd there is a Buddhist festival beside the lake to offer sacrifices. Every participator piously

1. **In front of Bamu Temple, people sing and dance in Baizu nationality style.**
2. **One day before offering sacrifices to the sea, the old women begin to make lotus lanterns.**
3. **It is time to fish now, so the naughty ospreys jump to the shoulders of their master.**

believes that it is the lake god, Avalokitesvara, and their ancestors who bring good blessings.

Since the first time I met Zhang Sijie, she mentioned the festival constantly. On the morning Sijie mystically gave me a piece of red paper and urged me to look after it well. It was an invitation with the 10 commandments of Buddhism on the back.

In the mist I came to Xinhe Village for the ceremony with Zhang Sijie. It was held in Bamu Temple beside the lake, which enshrined Avalokitesvara and was supposed to be her dwelling. There were an image of Avalokitesvara of Floating Sea Facing the Lake, and images of the Gods of Fishing. Fishermen all prayed for blessings here. Zhang Sijie customarily lighted the incense and made offerings for prayer.

The Bamu Temple has many worshippers. They bring offerings of bundles of incenses and fruit. They all dress well especially well for the occasion.

After Zhang Sijie entered the hall, she knelt down for worship and began chanting sutras. She was an important member of the gathering and indispensable for many activities.

After finishing chanting, Zhang Sijie called the company out of the temple. They were going to chant sutras again facing the lake. I asked her what they chanted. She briefly told me that they were giving thanks to Avalokitesvara and begged her blessing for health, safety and prosperity. After an hour's chanting, they were on board the dragon boat to chant sutras at lake and made offerings to the lake. At the lake centre the elders freed fish into the lake. These frugal elders believed they were accumulating merit by the act.

After freeing the fish, the elders cleaned their clothes and chanted sutras over broad lake. The chanting became louder and louder, surpassing the flat sound of knocking the wooden fish.

Successor of Old Fishing Family

Yang Dengxuan, the youngest girl in Yang's family, was getting married soon. Zhang Sijie issued a wedding

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invitation to me very early.

Shacun Village is a big village with more than 1,000 residents and is also a historic cultural village of the Bai nationality. Zhang Sijie said they would invite their son-in-law today. Yang Dengxuan was the most beautiful and capable daughter in Yang's family, and they didn't want to marry her out of the family.

Marriage was an important event. The parents provided the daughter with a rich and generous dowry, and they also sent the new couple an aluminum boat. The boat was bigger than the boat given to their son, costing 2,160 yuan. I asked him why they didn't give a cheaper wooden boat. "Nowadays, everybody uses aluminum boats — wooden boats easily crack in the sunshine and need repairing. It causes too much trouble." The parents hoped that fishing would stay in the family. "Fishing is our family tradition and we can't give it up," said Yang.

In the newly decorated courtyard, the guests came to celebrate the wedding. Wearing a new woolen suit, Old Yang was greeting guests. Obviously, the new shoes which Old Yang was wearing were hurting his feet, so he seemed a little lame. But Yang was so happy that he smiled from the bottom of his heart.

Generally, it takes three days to complete a wedding. The activities are different every day and the food they eat is different. The first day was to set up house, stick red couplets to the new house and hang up coloured banners. Today the wedding dinner was the favourite food — pig skin of the Bai nationality. After killing the pig, they used fire to burn the hair, and roasted the skin, cut it into pieces and ate it with a bowl of seasoning soup. The second day was to celebrate the entrance of a new son-in-law and they ate six big bowls of food, with fish and meat. The new couple hurried through Eryuan at 4:00 p.m. followed by the bridegroom's team. The team began to blow the trumpet and beat gongs when they were walking near the village; they continued to perform when they came to the house. Then they carried gifts such as a TV, fridge and motorcycle given by the bridegroom. After entering the house, the new couple had a rest. They prayed to Guangyin and the Sea God, hoping for blessings.

The third day was the most celebrated day of the whole wedding. For starter, the breakfast was fish. They hoped the new couple would be richer year by year. In the afternoon, they ate Chinese cake and then ate eight big bowls of food, including chicken, duck, fish and shrimp; it meant everything is complete and ready.

Early on the morning of the sixth day, Old Yang asked the new couple to get up. He said to them very seriously, "My happiness has it own ending — a wedding is the beginning of life. You should live your own life and work hard."

From then on, there is one more small fishing boat in the vast sea of Erhai Lake.

1. **Before the image of Avalokitesvara, people pray for a happy and rich life.**
2. **After sacrificing in the temple, people take a boat and begin the second blessing on the lake.**
3. **On the first day of a wedding, the new couple worship on bended knees to pray for Buddha to bless them.**

Home by the Great Wall – Red Capital Ranch

Photos & Article by Dianna

A trip to Beijing without visiting the Great Wall is incomplete. But such a visit is often accompanied by hustle and bustle, noise and fatigue. Fortunately, an alternative is there for you.

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The Badaling section of the Great Wall is the first choice of many tourists. My favourite is the Mutianyu section, not because former US president Bill Clinton visited it, but because of a Manchurian hunting lodge nestled in the north, the Red Capital Ranch. It's the first and only eco-tourism resort set on a private estate.

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First Eco-Tour Resort In Beijing

Located in the suburbs some 70 km from downtown Beijing, the Red Capital Ranch covers 3.3 ha, surrounded by mountains, rivers and the ruins of the Great Wall. The place belonged to a Manchu branch in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and later served as a hunting ground for the royal families in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The owner of today's ranch took inspiration from the hunting lodges of Qing emperors Kangxi and Qianlong. The work took two years, with the participation of artisans who repaired the Forbidden City. The ranch architecture features a combination of Manchu, Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist cultures. The oriental philosophy of Zen School of Buddhism as well as Taoism — revering nature — was applied in its layout.

A special bus service from the ranch is available to bring visitors from downtown, and the ride takes more

than an hour. At the ranch, a large pseudo-classic gate connects a life-like ancient wall extending from the mountain. Most of the wall has been renovated superbly. An aura of mystery surrounds the ranch. I'm familiar with the feeling because two years ago I visited the Red Capital Residence in a Beijing hutong (small alley). It's no surprise, since they are owned by the same person.

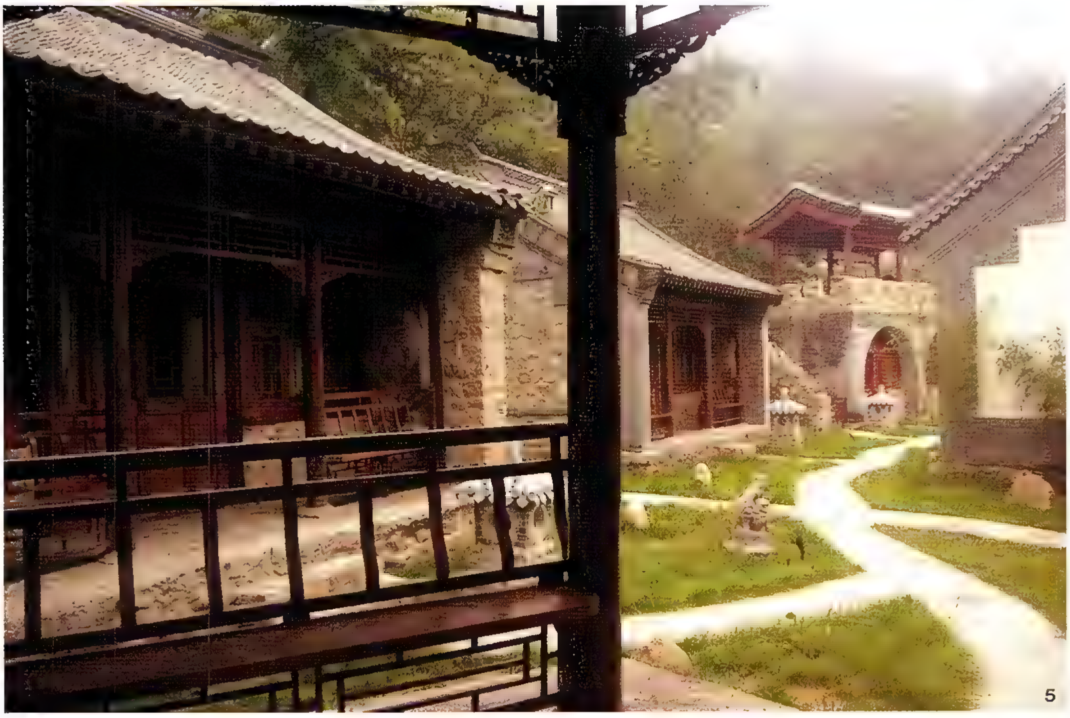
A Place of Good Geomantic Omen

We seemed to have gone back in time. A valley of luxuriant vegetation is dotted with antique Ming and Qing style buildings. A river winds through the estate, and the Great Wall ruins are visible half way up the mountain. The wall here was built in the Ming Dynasty, to resist the Manchurian aggressors.

The mountains, water and undulating wall reminded me of a pattern in feng shui (or geomancy): black dragon on the left and white tiger on the right. The gate in the east, the "black dragon", symbolises fortune and wisdom. The Tibetan Tiger Lodge in the position of the "white tiger" symbolises the realisation of dreams. The mountain top in the north is the "black tortoise", which gives the blessing of security and peace, while the river in the south is where the "red phoenix" is, implying good luck.

Building on this unique environment, the ranch owner used the Taoist philosophy of nature in building restaurants, bars, teahouses, pavilions and a dozen villas.

1. **The Mutianyu section of the Great Wall. (photo by Li Shaobai)**
2. **Ranch waitresses dressed in Manchu cheongsam. (photo by Andy)**
3. **The wall at the ranch gate is built according to the original Great Wall, and some of it is an extension of the original wall.**
4. **Elegantly designed key to a guestroom.**
5. **Inside the ranch are ten distinctive villas.**



All the buildings are made of stone, wood and bricks, taking consideration of the space proportion between people and nature. Many of the owner's personal collections are scattered around, including bridgehead stones, stone carvings and wood sculptures of the Ming Dynasty, and stone animals of the Qing Dynasty. The thinking is clear. After all, the conception of "green" depends more on our respect and care of nature, not just decoration.

Manchu, Mongolian and Tibet Cuisines

Entering the ranch, we first came across several distinguished bars and canteens.

The Warlord's Room is decorated in a nostalgic 1950s style. Guests can relax and enjoy a cigar along with a drink or snack. The old camera by the bar was used in the 1950s to photograph a number of state leaders, a significant witness to history.

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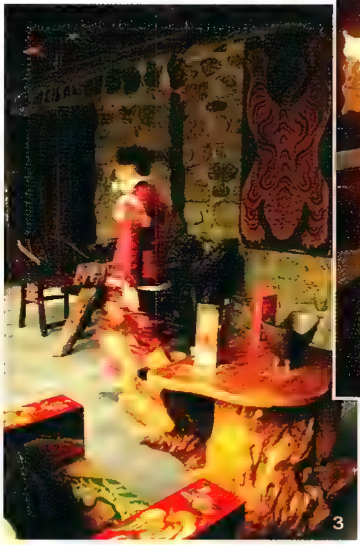
The Tibetan Tiger Lodge is an ideal place for a hearty chat over wine while enjoying the view of the Great Wall ruins. On display inside the bar is a tiger-patterned door from a Tibetan temple of the 19th century.

The Manchurian Hunting Lodge provides an excellent dinner. The decor and food are a mixture of Manchu, Mongolian and Tibetan styles. There is a rich variety of food, drinks and deserts, including roast meats like Mongolian lamb and Tibetan yak, black bean curd, green tea ice cream, Mongolian cheese, Tibetan buttered tea, Yunnan coffee and French wine.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Residing in the Eight-Trigram Battle Array

Walking away from the teahouse past the goldfish pond, I arrived at a wonderland. Ten distinctive villas came into view, arranged in an eight-trigram battle array clockwise from the south, named water, lake, thunder, wind, mountain, fire, heaven, earth, yin (feminine or negative principle in nature) and yang (the masculine or positive principle in nature). Most of the rooms in these villas are either traditional Chinese, Tibetan or Manchu. In the three Tibetan-style Shambhala Residence suites, the screens are made from temple doors from Lhasa. The four Manchu suites, the Manchurian Residences, are decorated with Qing Dynasty carvings. Two Dunhuang Suites are decorated with images of flying Apsaras styled on the Dunhuang Mogao grotto frescoes. The cave-style Yanan Retreat recreates the utopia-like atmosphere.

The theory of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) was applied to each house, with Qing Dynasty stone animals and deck chairs for guests to relax.

Settling down in the ranch, I found that almost every scene here has a story behind it. I suggest that visitors first read the pamphlet available in each room and then tour the ranch following the instructions.

Don't be fooled by the graceful classic styles — each room is equipped with all mod-cons. Even the tea bags and bathroom articles are choice products: scented tea, Chinese cassia soap and ginseng shampoo. Six Mongolian tents and traditional Chinese and Tibetan spas will be built soon.

2

Touching the Great Wall

After a sound sleep in a quiet environment, I felt completely refreshed. Sightseeing seemed the best choice following a free breakfast. There are two choices — enjoy the sight of the Great Wall from one of seven kiosks, or just go ahead and climb the wall.

It was a foggy day, so I had only one option, the more physical one. According to the staff, it takes only half an hour to reach the nearest site, but it's a four-hour return

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trip to the mountaintop.

We went along a mountain path into the thick forest. It is not too challenging, but as there is no established path, we had to find our own way up the mountain. Perhaps we took the wrong way. Instead of climbing onto the wall, we had to carefully step along the edge of the wall between the cliff. But it was worth the effort. Compared with the crowded scenes on a group tour, this free and easy adventure is far more more exciting, original and interesting.

Nearing the top, I extended half my body into the air and stretched out my left arm for a few close-up shots of the gate tower from a wider angle. Then I faced the wall, gripped the bricks and started climbing. Although it was not so dangerous, my legs and arms ached. The proverb goes, "he who doesn't climb the Great Wall is not a true man." You have to pay for being a true man.

1. **The cave-style guestroom**
2. **Some rooms are decorated with images of flying Apsaras as in the frescoes of the Dunhuang Mogao Caves.**
3. **The Tibetan Tiger Lodge is a Tibetan style bar.**
4. **Various ancient objects are on display inside the Manchurian Hunting Lodge; for instance, hunting weapons used by ancient aristocrats. (photo by Andy)**
5. **"Monk fish" is a vegetable dish using white mushrooms (78 yuan). It originated from temple cuisine.**
6. **Tibetan mutton steak (118 yuan)**
7. **Baked corn cake (8 yuan/piece).**
8. **My intimate touch with the Great Wall (photo by Andy).**

5

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*US $1 ~ 8 yuan

Travel Tips:

8

Food: The Red Capital Ranch provides a rich variety of food and drinks. Their prices for reference: appetiser soup 25-68 yuan*; seafood and meat dishes 78-188 yuan; wild herb and vegetable dishes 8-78 yuan; desert and beverages no less than 20 yuan. Lunch packages are available for walk-in. Breakfast is free of charge.

Accommodation: Only 10 villas are available at the ranch. Reservations are required.

Website: www.redcapitalclub.com

Tel: (86) 010-8401-8886

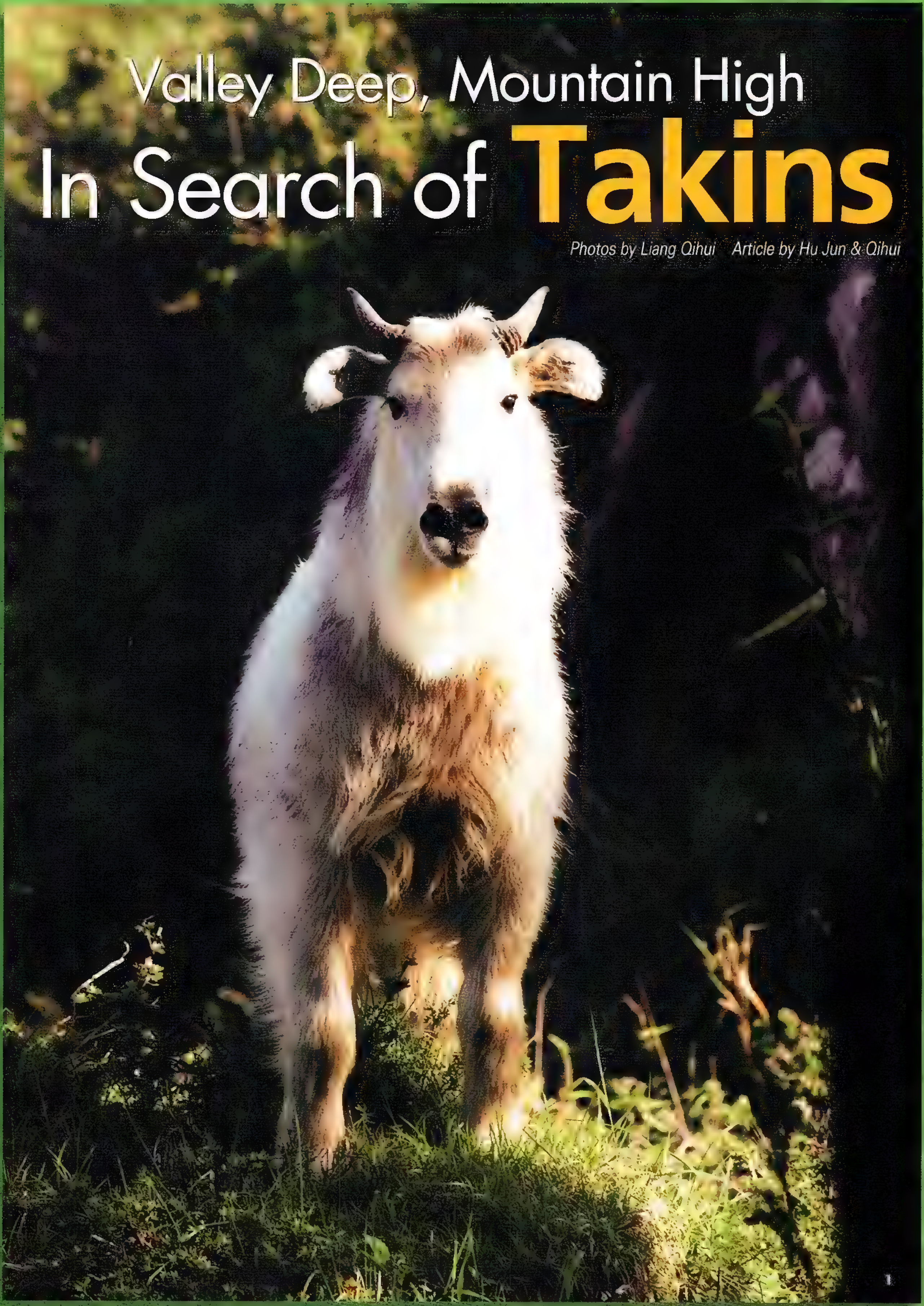
Price: Each villa can accommodate two people: US $188/night (plus 15% service charge)

Transport: No public buses go to the Red Capital Ranch. But the ranch has special buses running between the ranch and the airport/downtown city (a ride of 1-1.5 hours) and between the ranch and the nearby Mutianyu Great Wall Scenic Area (admission: 35 yuan, gondola service: 35 yuan one way and 50 yuan return).

Valley Deep, Mountain High

In Search of Takins

Photos by Liang Qihui   Article by Hu Jun & Qihui



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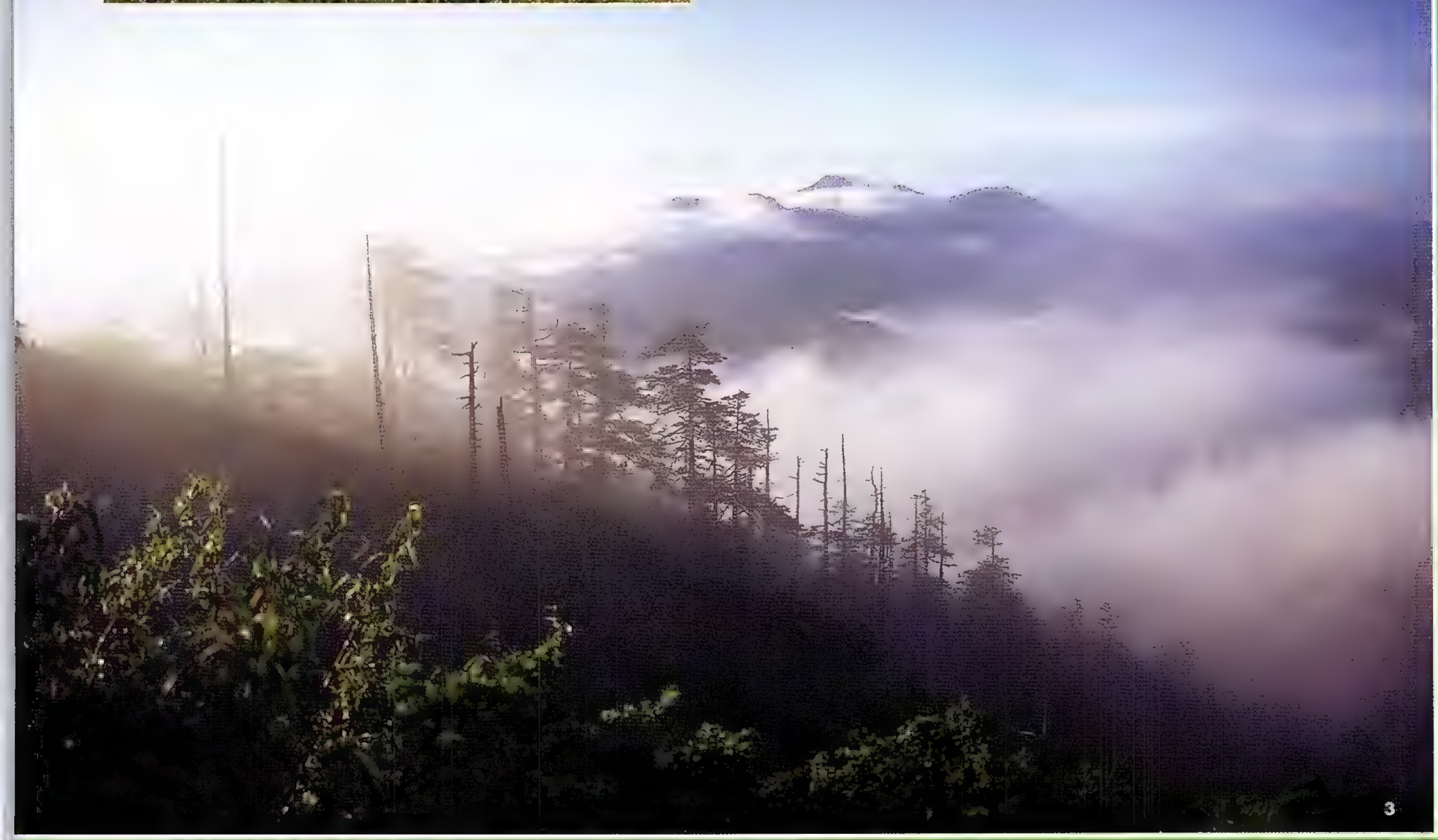
On the border of southern and northern China, the Qinling Mountains with their complicated topography, varied climate and abundant ecological resources have become a "natural gene pool" for fauna and flora. The takin is a Class A protected animal in China. Heavily built yet nimble and quick, the animal appears like a cross between a goat and an ox, and lives at altitude of up to 3,000 m. Liang Qihui has spent 20 years climbing mountains and wading across rivers to look for this elusive beast.

In May 1985, Liang Qihui and Pan Wenshi, both workers at Foping Nature Reserve in the Qinling Mountains, went into the mountains to observe giant pandas. When Liang approached a mountain ridge, he suddenly heard a noise and smelt something repugnant. Turning his head, he saw in thick grass a plump coffee-coloured animal moving slowly in front of him. At first, he took it for a calf. But the animal stopped abruptly and stared at Liang with watery eyes.

"How come there is a calf at such high altitude? Where has it come from?" Liang squatted down slowly to examine the little creature carefully. With a dark brown downy coat, a pair of tender horns, a high-bridged nose and a tuff of pointed beard, it looked like a cross between a goat and an ox. The next moment Liang's eyes were ablaze with excitement. "Good Heavens!", he burst out, "It's a takin!" He only heard about the animal from the elders in his boyhood, and even though he worked at the nature reserve for many years, but he had never seen one. Suppressing his elation, he walked gently to the little

1. **Female takins are as white as snow.**
2. **The photographer tails the takins and takes photos.**
3. **The Qinling Mountains constitute a protective screen in the south of Central Shaanxi. This is a bird's-eye view of the Foping Nature Preserve taken from Mount Guangtou.**



takin and took it in his arms. He intended to take the little creature back to the station but it struggled slightly and mooed. Liang immediately thought that it would be dangerous because the crying of the baby takin might draw a group of adult animals to the spot. He put it down reluctantly. As soon as it touched the ground, the young takin scampered off. After running some distance, it stopped and looked back. Liang waved goodbye.

That night when the researchers met at the station, Liang told the others how he had encountered a little takin. Pan Wenshi and several others from Beijing were pleasantly surprised. The next day they went to the same place to look for the animal, but due to the heavy snow, they found no trace.

Mount Guangtou — Habitat of Takins

In 1986, a research team headed by Liang Qihui entered the primeval forest for a systematic investigation of takins.

The habitat of takins is the primeval forest on Mount Guangtou, which is rarely visited by people. Overgrown with brambles and thick weeds, it was difficult for the team to move. They could only follow tracks made by the takins. Climbing for six or seven hours along such a track, they finally reached the mountaintop, where they were assailed by a strong fetid smell.

Sure enough, that day the team found three herds of takins totalling more than 50 animals. They observed the animals as closely as they could, entailing quite a few moments of danger and excitement. That night, overjoyed at their initial success, the team members celebrated with a bout of drinking. Perhaps their complacency offended the Mountain Gods, or perhaps Mount Guangtou was deliberately testing the willpower of the team, they met with continuous chilly wind and unremitting rain for the next seven days. Confined to their small tents, they talked incessantly, developing backache while the rain continued to fall. Fog gathered and dispersed, and it was not until the eighth day that the weather cleared. But they had already exhausted their supplies, willpower and energy. The only choice for them was to leave the mountain.

The Law of the Jungle

Every year from June to July, takins in the Qinling Mountains move to the upper slopes to mate. It is also the

best opportunity for researchers to observe the animals.

In June 1999, Liang Qihui with several fellow researchers climbed Mount Guangtou once again. On their heels, a herd of takins moved up the mountain. Liang was thrilled, and the group met with the animals almost every day in the next 20 days. One day they saw four herds numbering 130 animals. On one occasion, they saw an extraordinarily large mating herd with over 100 animals. In China, such a magnificent sight can probably only be seen in the Qinling Mountains, or on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. During the observation, they confronted takins face to face many times on narrow paths, sometimes only two or three metres away. The clicking of their cameras scared the animals away, but on most occasions the fleeing party was Liang and the team.

In order to decipher the hierarchy of a takin herd, Liang sneaked into a herd. He found that of the 18 animals, five were young, three were adult males and the rest females. The males placed themselves in various positions. An older brown-haired male apparently took position at the edge of the herd, glancing around occasionally. Another one with a golden coat also at the edge of the herd walked restlessly, making noises every so often. However, it never went into the herd to chase after the females. The last one at the centre of the herd ran back and forth, mating with the females. Obviously, it was the head of the herd. The other two aged takins were probably the previous heads while the restless male was a challenger. It seems the takin herd is a rigidly stratified society and it is not easy for a male to gain a foothold.

The researchers witnessed the primitive bloody fight among males for the right of mating. Liang also discovered that favoured young animals are pampered and cared for by both the male and the female.

Climbing a Tree for Dear Life

Once while observing the mating process, Liang Qihui stayed for over a fortnight on Mount Guangtou. One day when he was taking photos of a mating pair, the female takin flared up and blew loudly through its nose unexpectedly. The next second the wild animal rushed toward him with a swift clatter of hoofs. Liang took to his heels with the wild animal in hot pursuit. Luckily there was a tree nearby that Liang climbed in desperation. When he was halfway up the tree, the takin reached the foot of the tree howling furiously. He was so frightened that his body felt like jelly, while sweat ran down his spine. After the animal left, he decided to climb down but found he was too frightened. As if paralysed, he had to stay up the tree for over two hours before he could manage to get down.

Having experienced narrow escapes many times, Liang became more courageous and moved even closer. As gregarious animals, takins have a regular lifestyle. If one of them goes downhill, it certainly has its own reasons. Usually it is sick and too weak to catch up with the group. After leaving the group, it waddles down alone aimlessly. When it comes to a lower altitude, more often than not, it runs across people. There is no knowing whether it has been driven away by the head of the group or fled for another reason. Nevertheless, having been in close contact with takin for about 20 years, Liang knew they would not attack people needlessly. Many a time when he approached a takin, the frightened animal got ready to attack. However, so long as you stand still, it will leave peacefully.

Duty-Bound to Save Takins

With years of publicity and education, public

1. **The changeable weather in the Qinling Mountains makes finding takins difficult.**
2. **In June and July every year takins move to the higher slopes to mate. The photo shows a herd of takin on Mount Guangtou.**
3. **The living condition of the wildlife investigation workers is very simple.**
4. **The investigation camp in the recesses of a forest.**

consciousness of wild animal protection has become stronger. There has been very little poaching of takins. Furthermore, there are many stories of people helping or rescuing takins.

Shanshan was born on February 27, 2004, the first baby takin born in the Qinling Wildlife Park. Unfortunately, the mother did not have milk to nurse her baby. The only thing she could do for the newborn was to lick its cheeks and body. The park attendants tried every means to add more nutrition to her diet, but to no avail. After feeding Shanshan with powdered milk for a few days, the park workers bought two milk goats from a nearby village. At first, the stubborn little creature refused to suckle. They tried to daub some goat milk on its mouth for a taste. Gradually it accepted the two "wet nurses". Now it has grown to four kilograms and is the "eldest son" in the park herd.

On July 20, 2003, a male takin defeated in love ran away from the group. After attacking two people near Mount Jifeng about 10 km from Baoji, it was captured and

Dossier of Takins

The takin in the Qinling Mountains is also known as the golden takin or white goat. Neither a goat nor an ox, they live in high mountains around 3,000 m above sea level. Heavily built, they can run very fast on steep slopes, and are nimble and capable of jumping down from a height of 10 m. The male is usually yellowish and the female white. Both with long manes, they can roar like thunder. A peculiar and precious wild animal, the takin is one of China's four national treasures, along with the golden monkey, the brown-eared pheasant and the giant panda.

The takin family falls into four subspecies: the nominated subspecies, the Bhutan subspecies, the Sichuan subspecies and the Qinling subspecies. The takin population is mostly scattered around China, and the Sichuan and Qinling subspecies are indigenous to the country. In the takin family, the Qinling species is the biggest in size, 1 - 2.2 m in length and 250 to 350 kg. Both the male and female carry a pair of sturdy horns, which curve outward and backward. Their hair is short and fluffy. Adult takins have a beard and a short tail.

In 1974, Shaanxi provincial authorities made the first investigation on the takin in the Qinling Mountains. In the five counties, namely Taibai, Foping, Zhouzhi, Yangxian and Ningxia, where population density is comparatively high, they recorded 242 animals. In the autumn and winter of 1990, takins in Foping Nature Reserve numbered 117 to 295; in 1996, there were between 435 and 527. The yearly growth rate is 18.5%. Curently, there are about 5,000 takins in the Qinling Mountains.

The takin is China's key protected animal and in the Red Paper published by IUCN, it is listed as one of the rarest species of animals.

sent to Shaanxi Provincial Wildlife Preserve Centre.

One day in March 2002, a takin gored Wang Shuansheng, a farmer working up the mountain. The accident happened on a mountain slope in Miaogou Village. Villagers rushed the wounded man to hospital immediately and reported the event to the authorities. At 10:00 a.m. or so, there were nearly 100 people on the site, and they formed a semicircle round the takin to keep it from going down the slope to hurt anyone else. About an hour later, the takin suddenly sprang up, darted east and crossed a low mountain ridge nearly two kilometres away. Then, at Tuogou Village, it attacked another farmer and hid in a deserted cave. In the afternoon, an expert shot it with an anaesthetic dart. Staggering out of the cave, it went into the courtyard of a farmhouse in Zhuyu Village of Maying Township and collapsed. After an examination, the expert gave it an injection of anesthetic and sent it to the Shaanxi Provincial Wildlife Preserve Centre.

Shot Dead After Killing a Farmer

In the past few years, the protective work has resulted a rapid increase in takins. However, conflicts between the animals and people occur frequently. Residents within the preserve have an excellent attitude to wildlife protection. Even so, if a takin goes mad and endangers people's lives, extraordinary measures have to be taken.

On May 20, 2002, a sturdy takin dashed into Liu Yongchang's house in Tianling Village and knocked the farmer down at the doorway. The victim lay in a pool of blood. His wife Zhou Cunfeng was also at home. Running up and down in the house, the giant takin scared the wife into shock. Many villagers immediately reported what had happened to the township government.

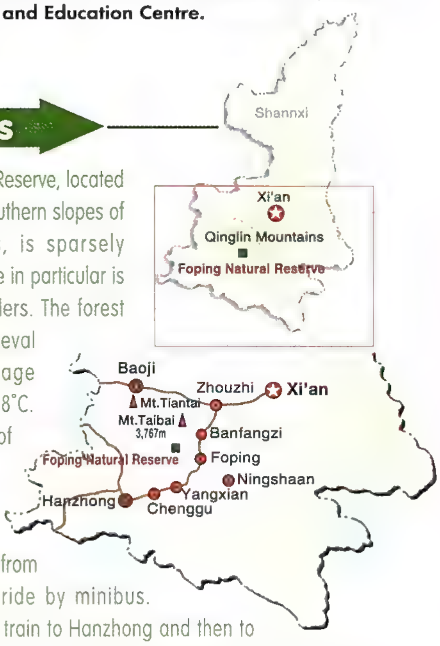
At the news, officers from the county forest bureau and the county government hurried to the village. Liu Yongchang seemed to be on his last legs and his wife was hiding under the cupboard. She had received wounds to many parts of her body and was in imminent danger. The takin was still running madly through the house.

May and June is the mating season and these animals are especially dangerous during this time. However, according to the Wildlife Protection Law, measures adopted against any Class A nationally protected wild animal should be reported to and approved by the national forest department first. Therefore, the county government hurried the report to the provincial forest office. By then, the takin had been in the victim's house for more than three hours. The woman's cries for help came continuously from the house. At 1:20 p.m., a message from the provincial forest office finally approved the killing of the takin.

Translated by Anju K.

1. **An adult female takin. Adult takins have a beard and a short tail.**
2. **Villagers find sick takins roaming around villages or farms between winter and spring every year. They are apt to attack.**
3. **Visitors can get information on local wild animals and plants from the Qinling Publicity and Education Centre.**

Travel Tips



Weather: Foping Natural Reserve, located in the hinterland on the southern slopes of the Qinling Mountains, is sparsely populated. The tourist zone in particular is seldom trodden by travellers. The forest environment is in a primeval condition with an average temperature in July of 21.8°C. Without the intense heat of summer, it is the best time for travel.

Transport: Foping Natural Reserve is 215 km from Xi'an City, a four-hour ride by minibus. Travellers can also take a train to Hanzhong and then to Foping. It is only 100 km or so from Hanzhong to Foping, about an one-hour ride along the expressway. Local tourist guides are available for the visit to the primeval forest. For those who intend to get close to takins or giant pandas on Mount Guangtou, professional guides are needed. The Qinling Publicity and Education Centre was set up in May 2004. With an exhibition area of about 1,000 m^2, the centre displays over 400 specimens of birds and animals, over 1,000 specimens of plants and more than 500 pictures. It is the best site for travellers to find information on Qinling wild animals and plants.

Admission:

The Qinling Human and Nature Publicity and Education Centre: RMB 25

Opening Time: 8:00-17:00

Accommodation (Hanzhong City):

Shishi Hotel	Tel: (0916) 203 2700
Tianyuan Building	Tel: (0916) 223 8989
Jinjiang Hotel	Tel: (0916) 223 8588

Information Office: Shaanxi Foping National Natural Reserve Administration Bureau (Foping Tourism Administration Department)

Tel: (0916) 891 6002, 891 6339 Fax: (0916) 891 6002

Fairytale World of Rime Ice —Kuerbin

Photos & Article by Tan Wentou

I live in the city of Yichun in Heilongjiang Province, dubbed "China's Forest Capital". It is at the far northern tip of China, and almost half the year it is covered with ice and snow. I had always been under the impression that Jilin (Jilin Province) was the ultimate place for rime ice photography, until two years ago I discovered the Kuerbin River region in Yichun.

Since then I have become enchanted with the fairytale snowscapes of Kuerbi, and every autumn I long for the onset of winter, so I can indulge my photographic obsession in Kuerbin's thick forests and endless snowfields.

Unique Rime Ice Scenic Spot

The Kuerbin Reservoir has a capacity of some 390 million m^3, covering 30 km^2. Power is generated at the hydroelectric plants, which discharges warm water into the Kuerbin River. Because the temperature of the river water and the ambient air is so different, you often see steam wafting above the water, forming rime ice. When the steam meets the ice-cold trees, it crystallises around the tree branches and rocks in layers of icy froth. The region's high latitude (about 47° north latitude) equals long winters and low temperatures, so naturally there is a longer period of rime ice than in Jilin and also a much larger area where rime ice is formed.

The Kuerbin River region has varied topography and vegetation, resembling a magical world when it is decorated with rime ice. This fantasy land takes up a huge area of 27 km^2!

From mid November onwards, rime ice quietly appears on the trees around the Kuerbin River. The scenery gets better and better after December, and it is not until mid-

1. **A World of Pure Snow. Hasselblad x-pen camera, 45mm lens with a middle gray lens; 1/15second, 16 aperture.**
2. **Morning sun on the snowfields**

March that the rime ice "sculptures" melt. There are 120 days per year when the rime ice adorns trees for six hours a day, and I can shoot roll after roll of film in bliss.

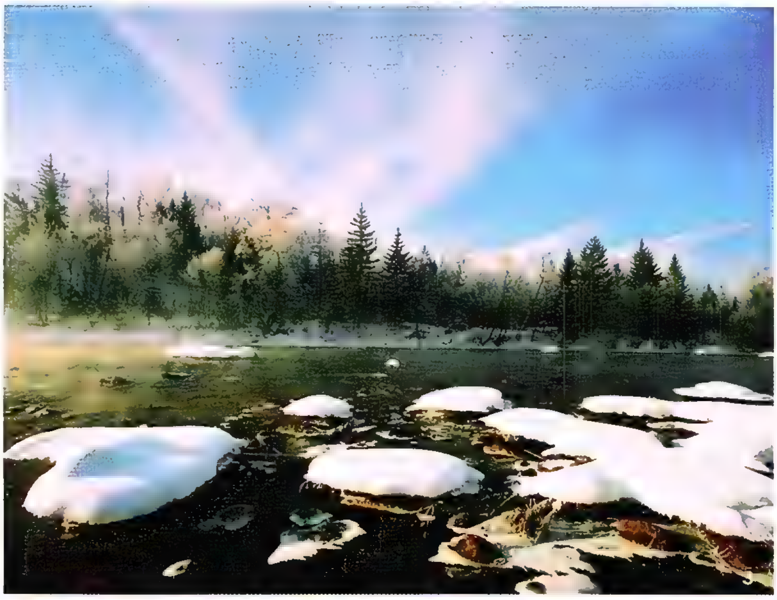
Shooting Tips

Taking photographs can be an immense challenge in arctic temperature; the level of difficulty is perhaps unimaginable to our friends in the sunny south.

The best time to photograph rime ice is in the morning, when the tree hangings are thick and the daybreak light is best. But if it's during the coldest months from December to February, the temperature at dawn is usually around -38°C or even less, rendering even the most nimble-fingered lensman clumsy and slow. Even tiny movements involved in operating the camera, changing the lens or films can be a huge effort. Here electronic cameras show their Achilles' heel, because batteries will not work under -30°C, so even if you keep the camera close to your body when it's not being used, as soon as you take it out and take a few photos, the shutter stops. Naturally the smarter alternative is an all-mechanical camera that doesn't require batteries, but some mechanical cameras can't withstand the -40°C either. It is said that photographers who work at the poles send their cameras and lenses to the original manufacturers and change the lubricants to an anti-freeze variety. We couldn't afford to do that, but the experienced guys have their own tricks. Some use external power supplies to keep the battery warm, or heat-packs. The rule of thumb is, whether you use a mechanical or electronic camera, don't leave it out in the extreme cold for long, holding it close to you is a safer bet.

When it comes to photographing ice, snow, rime ice, another tricky thing is getting the exposure right. Because the conditions are extremely bright, it's easy for the light metre to return a wrong reading, giving an underexposed picture. Therefore, compensating for exposure is needed. After taking an average light metre reading, increase the exposure by 1-2 stops depending on how much ice or snow is part of the picture — the larger the area of snow, the higher the increase in exposure. In my experience, take the reading of the blue sky in front light, minus half a stop to start with, then adjust accordingly.

1. **Kuerbin River. 1/15 s, F16**
2. **Icy frost. 1/60 s, F16**
3. **First snow. 1/60 s, F11~16**
4. **Autumn meets winter. Hasselblad x-pen camera, 45mm lens with a middle gray lens; 1/8 s, F11~16**



Equipment: large format cameras, 120 medium-format camera and 135 cameras will all work. Mid-focal lenses and wide-angle lenses are most suitable. It is best to use mechanical cameras because of the cold. Electronic automatic cameras are not recommended, digital cameras are even worse. Tripods are a must. Because the ultraviolet rays are strong under the blue sky, it is advisable to use an 81-series filter lens to prevent the picture from being too blue-hued.

Best Times: To shoot rime ice, the four hours after dawn are ideal. Along the Kuerbin River the scenery is varied, with rime ice extending over 10 km, so plan to shoot a different part each day.

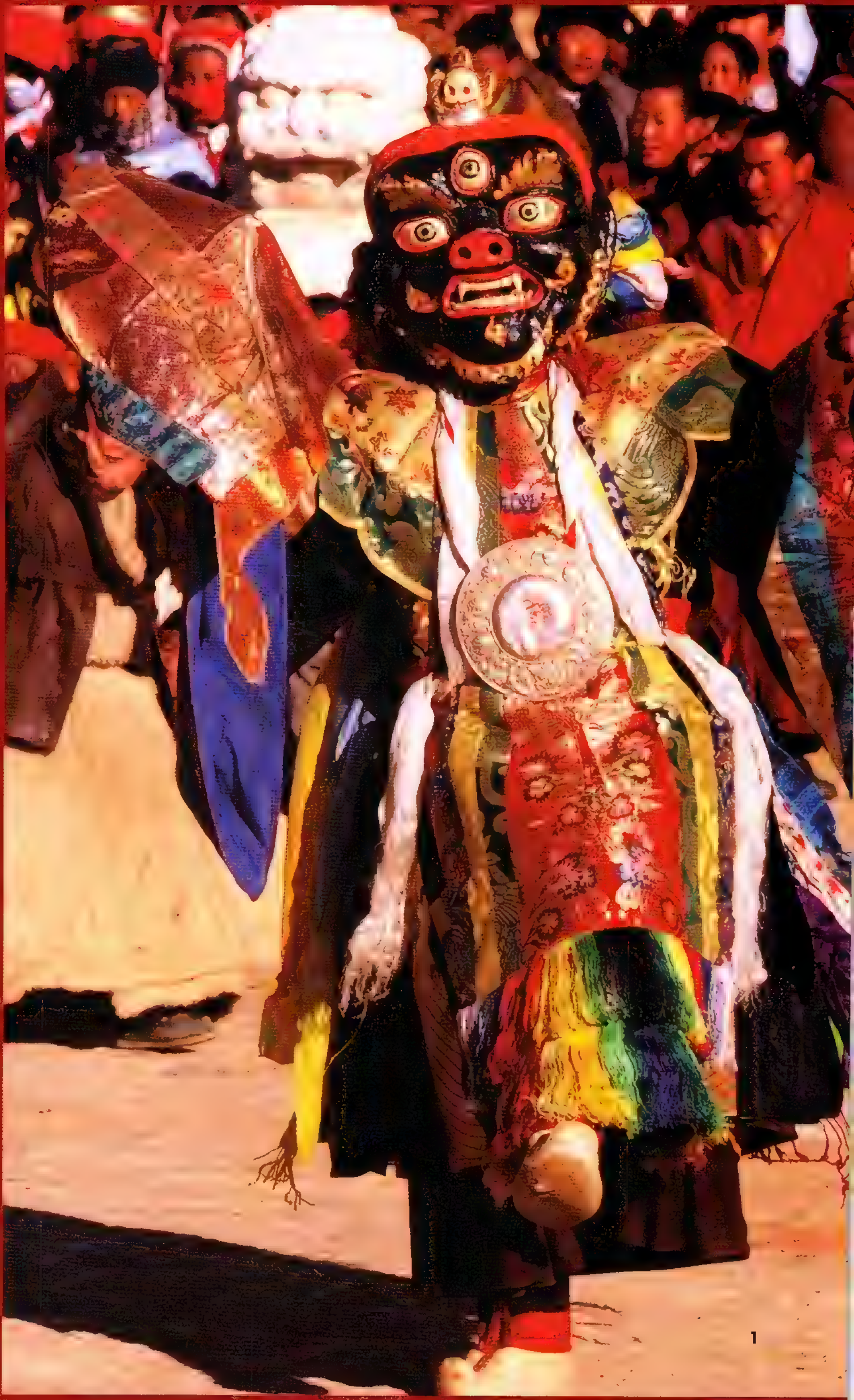
Transport: There are flights from Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Guangzhou to Harbin, the provincial capital of Heilongjiang. Then it's a four-hour bus ride from Harbin to Yichun. Then change buses to go to Hongxing Kuerbin rime ice scenic spot. Or take the eight-hour train ride to Hongxing from Harbin, and change to a bus to Kuerbin rime ice scenic spot.

Food and Accommodation: Kuerbin Inn is the local hangout for photography fanatics, where you can sleep on the distinctively northeastern heated brick bed. Even though it's remote, communication is not a problem, and broadband Internet access and telephones are available. You can feast on authentic northeastern fare such as fish, pork and starch noodle stew, and Cuihua pickled cabbage.

Travel Gear: Down jackets, hats, gloves, and snow boots should all be part of your attire. It's best to take some heat-packs to provide much needed heat for both you and your camera.

The annual Gedu Festival is held in Songtsen Ling Monastery of Shangri-la, Yunnan Province, on the 29th of the Tibetan winter month. It is a grand ceremony for various gods and protectors of Buddha dharma of the Esoteric Sect of Tibetan Buddhism to appear among the people. It is also a good time for Tibetan people to worship Buddha, and not to mention an eye-opener for tourists as well.

Photos & Article by Dou Weiyang



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Gods Dance in Revelry
Gedu Festival of Shangri-La

Before sunrise thousands of Tibetans swarm into Dadian Square of Songtsen Ling Monastery in the Deqen Tibet Autonomous Prefecture. The square, decorated with colourful silk banners, looked mysterious with incense smoke rising in coils. As the sun rose, trumpets and drums rang out the start of the Gedu Festival.

The Gedu Festival is staged to drive out demons, celebrate the harvest and pray for good fortune. In ancient times Tibetans used to dance wearing animal masks. Over the years, the dances have become more colourful and systemised.

Kind Hearts behind Hideous Visages

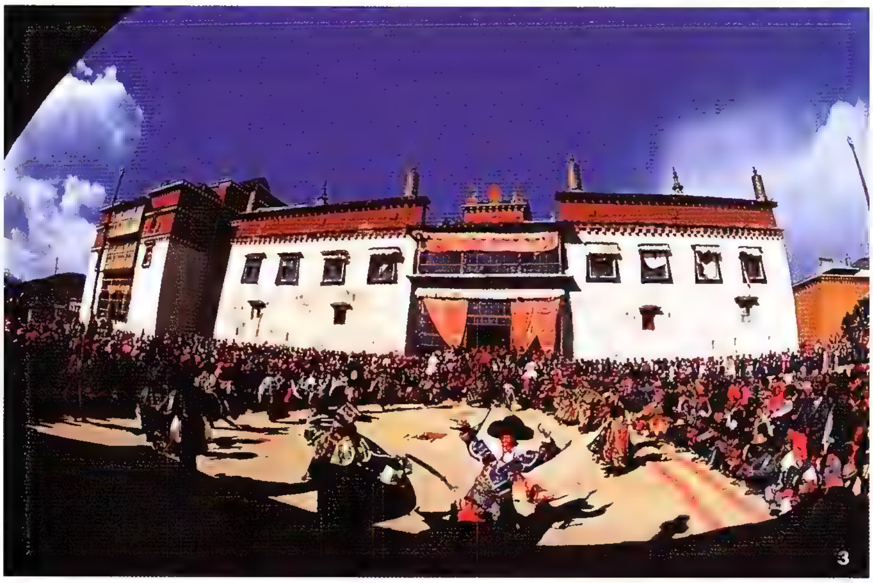
The masks all bear hideous visages, and their angry looks provoke awe and veneration. Tibetan Buddhism believes that people should be familiar with these faces, as they are the gods that lead the souls of the dead to the Pure Land and they also drive away demons.

The first to dance were the kings of Hell with ox faces. The black ox was followed by red, yellow and blue oxen, known as "Dangjin Qujie" in Tibetan. They danced heavily and slowly, to show their unwillingness to leave the Pure Land for the human world.

Since people in Deqen are farmers, one of the dances signifies ploughing and weeding, praying for a good harvest. The dances of Laughing Buddha ("Haxiang" in Tibetan) show the doctrines of Han Buddhas and the integration of Buddhism. There are also the dance performances of the red deer, crow, yaksha, and fairy; each character represents a god and tells a different story.

Buddhism Reflected in Dance

The graceful dances of the 24 incantation chanters wearing black hats tells the story of Lhalung Bhajedorje's assasination of Nangdama. Nangdama, king of Tibet, a believer in Bon religion, attacked Buddhism by destroying temples and forcing monks to return to secular life. A monk named Lhalung Bhajedorje realised he had been appointed by heaven to kill Nangdama. So, wearing a gown with the black side out and white side in, and riding a white horse, he hid himself in the crowd in front of the Potala Palace. Though Nangdama was afraid to come out, he was attracted by the beautiful music and dancing. Lhalung Bhajedorje used the opportunity to kill Nangdama and flee. He eluded the pursuing soldiers by turning his gown white side out and riding across the river.



Solemn Buddhist Music Stirs the Soul

The mask dancers were all monks from Songtsen Ling Monastery. Draped with the holy golden and white hada, they danced accompanied by suonan horn, trombones, bone horns, shell trumpets, bass drums and cymbals, creating a stirring spectacle.

1. **Dancing gods are dressed in striking attire.**
2. **The skeleton dance**
3. **The Gedu Festival in Songtsen Ling Monastery attracts Buddhists and tourists.**
4. **Monks from the Songtsen Ling Monastery are the main actors in the festival.**

Travel Tips

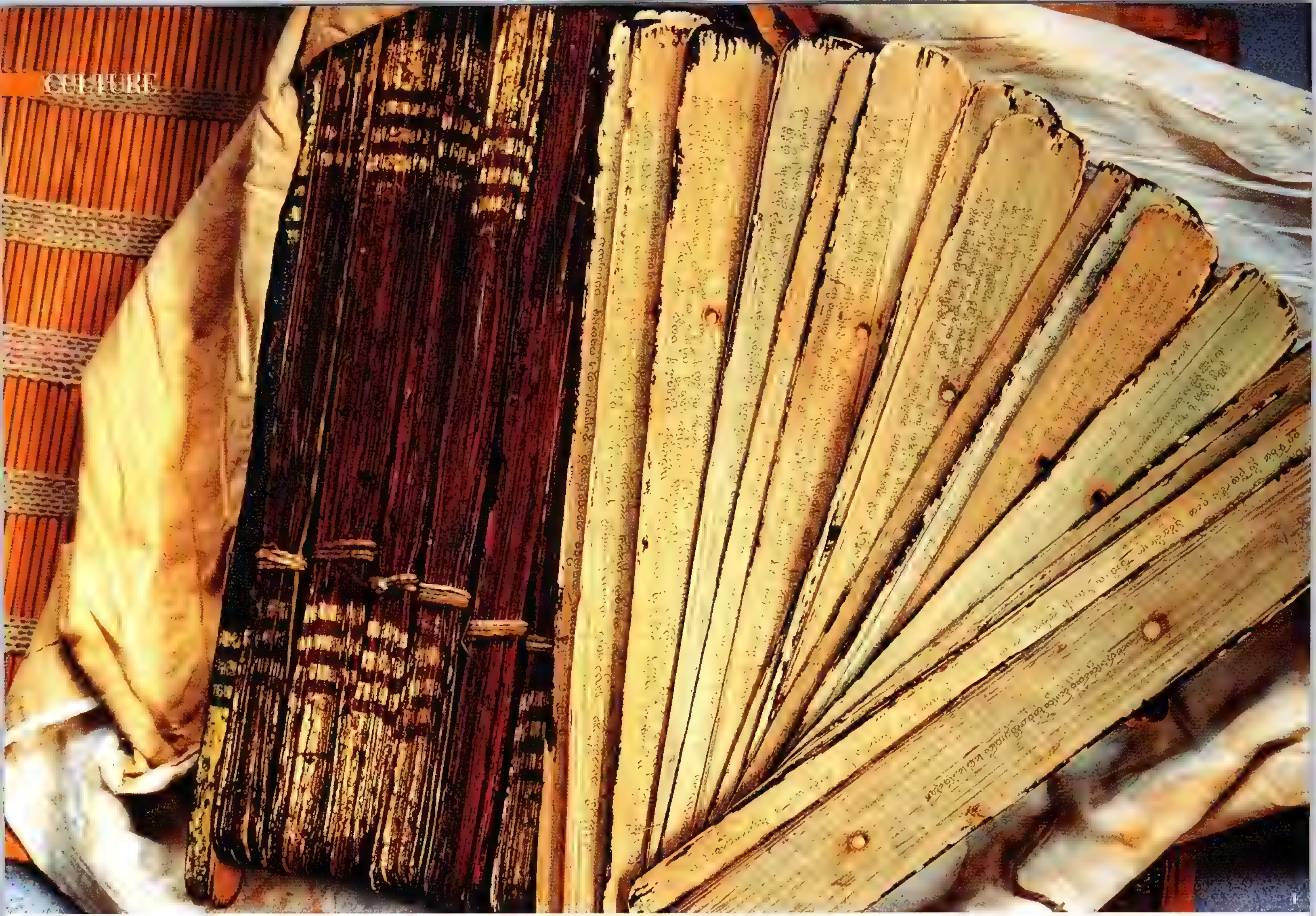
Time: It is held on 29th of the winter month in Tibetan calendar (around November 29 of lunar calendar). During this time, scenery of snowing may be seen, so more winter clothes are needed.

Place: Dadian Square of Songtsen Ling Monastery, five kilometres north of Shangri-la County seat.

Transportation:

1. Scheduled flights fly from Kunming to Shangri-la everyday. The fight takes about 40 minutes.
2. Take a bus from Kunming to Shangri-la. The ride is about one to two days.

Accommodation: People can stay in hotels in Shangri-la and enjoy buttered tea and yak meat dishes.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The Pattra-Leaf Buddhist Sutras of Dai People

Photos & Article by Li Zhisen

In the beautiful, abundant and mysterious land of Xishuangbanna, pattra leaves have been used for generations as the medium to pass on the culture of the Dai ethnic group.

2

The temples in Ganlanba (Menghan Town) are all surrounded by tall pattra trees. The Dai people call the pattra tree the "gelan". The ancestors of the Dai ethnic group wrote Buddhist scriptures on the pattra leaves. The pattra-leaf books of Buddhist scriptures are considered a sacred vessel for the history and culture of the Dai people. Since ancient times, major historical and cultural events have been recorded on pattra leaves and passed down through the generations.

Pattra Leaves Pass Ancient Tales

Long ago, a young Dai man said goodbye to his fianée and left in search of a new home. They wrote letters to each other on palm leaves delivered by parrots. But as the young man travelled farther, the palm leaves withered and the handwriting faded. One day the young man saw a pattra leaf being nibbled by insects. Inspired, he wrote a letter on the pattra leaf, and the characters remained legible after many days of travel. From then on, the Dai people used pattra leaves to record their history and culture. At the same time the pattra leaves signify "brightness" and "love."

Another legend says that long ago the people of Han, Dai and Hani went on a pilgrimage to India together to bring back Buddhist scriptures. The Han people copied the scriptures on paper while the Dai people used pattra leaves, and the Hani people leather. On the way back their boat capsised and the scriptures got wet. When they dried the scriptures out, the writing on the paper took the shape of the bird's footprints, hence becoming the bird script, an ancient form of Chinese written characters. On the other hand, the scriptures on pattra leaves were still clear and the Dai people were very proud. Unfortunately, the scriptures on leather copied by the Hani people faded so much that the skin was cooked for food. That is why the Hani ethnic group does not have a written language.

Experts believe that Buddhist scriptures on pattra leaves were introduced from Southeast Asia, when Buddhism was spread to the Dai area from Sri Lanka through Thailand and Myanmar. As Buddhism grew, more scriptures were copied onto the inexhaustible supply of pattra leaves in the subtropical zone where the Dai live. They wrote Buddhist scriptures on pattra leaves because they thought it was better than donating money to temples. Books of Buddhist scriptures on pattra leaves became more complex and the binding and layout have become even more exquisite.

Making A Pattra-Leaf Scripture Book

We observed the whole process of making a pattra-leaf Buddhist scripture book in Manjingkuang Temple in Ganlanba. First, leaves are picked from tall pattra trees in front of the temple and fastened together in layers of three to five leaves. The leaves are boiled together with lemon to make the cuticle of the leaves fall off. Generally the leaves are boiled for half a day until they turn a light greenish white. Then they are scrubbed with fine sand, flattened, and dried before being bound together. About 500 to 600 leaves are squeezed together between two planks and holes are drilled for binding.

At first, small sharp knives were used to carve the scriptures along the ink lines on the pattra leaves. But this method was too slow and later iron pens were used. After inscribing, the leaves are smeared with plant oil and pan soot and then wiped clean. The final step is to bind the pattra leaves and apply gold powder or red or black colouring to protect and decorate the book. This process makes the leaves waterproof and antiseptic, and allow them to remain unchanged for up to 1,000 years.

Scriptures of Great Wisdom

Dai people also copy Buddhist scriptures onto a kind of paper made from the fiber of tree bark. They write on this paper with pens made from a kind of fern. This type of paper is called "Boga Lasha" in the Dai language. There are two kinds, one on a wide page and one that is folding.

Of the two kinds of Buddhist scripture books, the pattra-leaf style is the most common. Dai people have 84,000 pattra-leaf Buddhist scripture books, called "Bemenxibankang" in the Dai language. The books are on topics including Buddhist culture, the science and technology of agriculture and forestry, medicine, local annals, literature, art and the moral principles of the Dai ethnic group. Dai scholars diligently wrote on pattra leaves from generation to generation to pass their wisdom down. They did not sign their names to the books, but left a huge legacy of pattra-leaf classical wisdom. They created a rich pattra-leaf culture, which is the encyclopaedia of the Dai ethnic group.

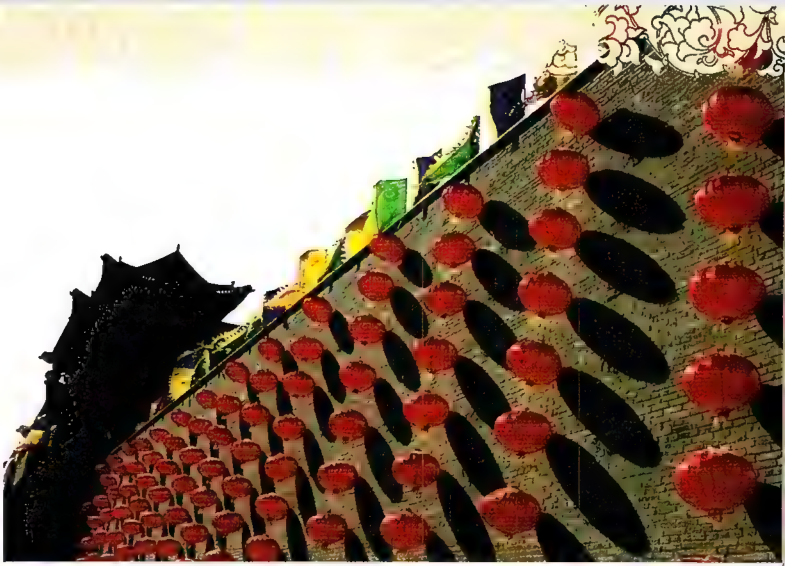
1. **Buddhist scriptures on pattra leaves carry the great wisdom of the Dai people.**
2. **Monks tie the pattra leaves together and then boil them for half a day.**
3. **The scripts on the pattra leaves can stay legible for as long as 1,000 years. (by Chan Yat Nin)**
4. **The writing of Buddhist scripture on pattra leaves was considered a meritorious act by monks of past dynasties.**

The Old Yuci City

Located in Jinzhong City, Shanxi, Yuci is a historic and cultural city with a history of 3,000 years. Yuci was named in the Warring States Period (475 - 221 BC) and belonged to the ancient Taiyuan Prefecture.

Yuci City was built on the site of an old town of the Han Dynasty in AD 582, and is now 1,400 years old. The old Yuci downtown has a long history, deep culture and unique tourist sites. It is a combination of cultural relics, natural scenery, old Shanxi commercial culture, folk customs and old civilisation. In Yuci, you can enjoy ancient houses, ramparts, temples, street and shops, and also mountains, rivers, forests, springs, and waterfalls. Meanwhile, the vigor of the old city is attributed to the simple folk customs and colourful folk arts, and the wonderful mixture of nature, human culture, history and arts.

Old Yuci City occupies an area of one million square kilometres, of which ancient buildings and gardens cover 600,000 km^2. There are many historic and cultural sites, such as the Temple of Town God, the County Authority, Confucius Temple, Fengming Study, South and North Streets, Market Building, Recalling Phoenix Building, Clear and Void Pavilion, Dacheng Buddhism Temple, West Garden, Relics Park, Zhufu Study and the Sang Yun Residence. The staggered constructions and raised eaves form a special Ming and Qing Dynasty style making for magnificent sights.



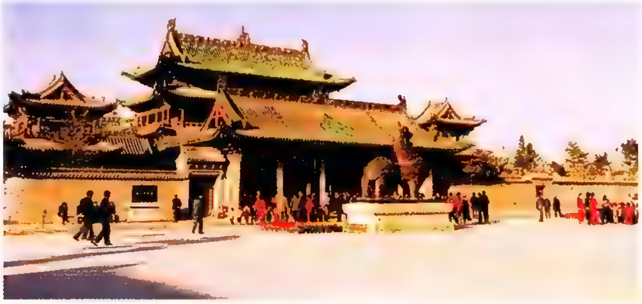
Location

Located in the middle of Shanxi, Yuci has Hanshan Mountain in the north, faces Xiaoshui River in the south, connects with Mt. Taihang in the east and is near Fenhe River in the west. Yuci district has a total area of 1,327 km². The area has many mountainous landforms, while the southwest area is mainly flat plains. Mountains, hills and plains each occupy one third of Yuci district.

Climate

The whole Yuci district has a continental climate, with four distinct seasons. In spring, the temperature rises quickly and most days are sunny; in summer, it is warm, hot and dry, with great temperature differences between day and night; in autumn, the temperature falls gradually and most days are sunny; winter is cloudy and cold. The annual average temperature is 9.8°C. The average temperature of the warmest month (July) is 23.5°C; and that of the coldest month (January) is -6.1°C. The annual average rainfall is 438.7 mm. The annual average relative humidity is 56%; the highest relative humidity is 73% in August, and the lowest relative humidity is 43% in April. It is recommended that tourists visit Yuci in the Labour Day, National Day and Spring Festival holidays.

Scenic Spots



Temple of Town God

The Temple of Town God is an important cultural site under state protection. It is one of the most complete town god temples in China. It was built in AD 1362 and occupies 6000 m². The magnificent Xuanjian building in front of the main hall is 25 m tall. In 1999, it was listed by the World Historic and Cultural Relics Protection Foundation as one of the finest 100 ancient buildings in the world. The Town God was an important god worshipped by Han people in ancient times, protecting the city and residents. For hundreds of years, people have spoken of legends of the Town God protecting residents. Now, many visitors come to Yuci City, burn incense to pray for prosperity and peace, and to express their wishes for a happy life.

Clear and Void Pavilion

In AD 1465, a Buddhist raised money and built the pavilion. It was called Jade Emperor Pavilion at first and also called the South Pavilion by citizens. The pavilion is 25 m tall and occupies 160 m². The Clear and Void Pavilion is a rare masterpiece of wooden attic architecture. The pavilion is original in composition, supported by 36 columns. From the pavilion, you can look up to the sky to forecast weather changes, or look down on the city. This is a place to feel the unity of the people, the city and the over-reaching horizon.

Wengcheng City

Built in AD 587-600, Wengcheng City is not only a part of the west city gate, but also a vital communication line and important barrier for the old city. Yuci City was the door to Jinyang from ancient times, so it was often fought over. The function of Wengcheng City was to enhance city protection and security from attack.

People can ponder history as they look at the dark brick wall, loess rampart, protruding arrow battlements and high turrets.

West Garden

The West Garden is located on the west side of the Temple of Town God, covering an area of 20,000 m², with buildings covering 900 m². In the garden, there are halls to the east, corridors and arbors to the west, rockworks and waterfalls to the north, and buildings and stone boat archways in the middle. The pavilions and halls are sited harmoniously and the construction methods and piled stones are unique in northern gardens.

Apart from the buildings, beautiful lakes and mountains, waterfalls and cliffs, the forest and lawns are unique and natural. The cobble road and zigzagging corridors are very attractive.

County Authority

Yuci County Authority is the most complete such building in China. The 21,000-m² structure is the largest county authority in China, and is known as "the first authority in Central China". Built in the Song Dynasty, the Yuci County Authority has five halls and 26 courtyards, the Recalling Phoenix Building, Yinbin House (Guest House), Prison God Temple, Temple of the Horse King and other buildings. The stone carving, brick carving and wood carving feature fine craftsmanship. The county authority is a precious historic specimen of feudal society and also a precious literary and historical databank, preserving valuable literature and records.

The Yuci County Authority complex is a unique source of information on county authority architectural style, the feudal hierarchy, and the combination of feudal monarchy and theocracy in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It is also a good place to enjoy the ancient architectural art of the Ming and Qing Dynasties, experience Shanxi culture, and learn about the development of bureaucracy in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Ming and Qing Dynasty Shopping Streets

Row upon row of shops and simple and elegant buildings line the pedestrian shopping streets, constructed in the typical architectural style of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Storefronts, workshops and residences form one unit, keeping the management pattern and characteristics of the store in the front and workshop or residence behind. These buildings are only two stories high and built of stone and wood. The woodcarvings, golden signboards, vermilion pavilions and eaves are simple, elegant and magnificent. The old street shops show strong cultural features. Beiqianheng, Dalonghao and Xiangji are old shops with a history of over 100 years.

The Ming and Qing shopping streets have become interesting cultural and historic sites, where people can go shopping, take a rest and enjoy some entertainment.

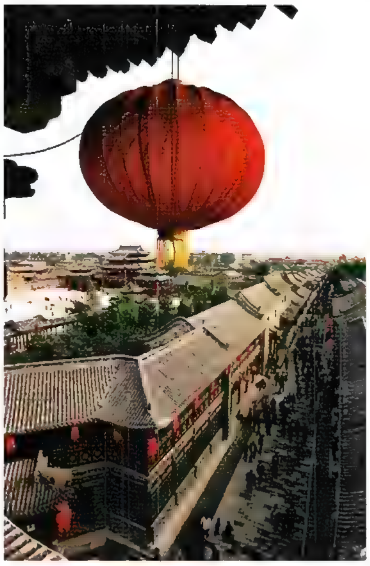
Former Residence of Sang Yun

Sang Yun (AD 1603 - 1660) was born in Yuci city. In 1639, he passed the provincial level civil service exam and became a successful candidate for the highest imperial examinations. After he took the office of Guangdong provincial administration commissioner, he broke down from constant overwork and died on a boat. Emperor Shunzhi called him "the first upright and clean official".

The former residence of San Yun is now a folk culture arts museum. It displays folk arts and crafts, and visitors can experience an interesting folk craft show.

Shanxi Merchants Museum

Located in the south of Dongdajie Sreet and west of Miaoqian square, the Shanxi merchants' museum is made up of two courtyards. It includes five parts: transportation, business, exchange, decline and remains. With many original documents, old pictures, seals and manuscripts, the museum displays the whole course of growth, development, flourish and decline. It introduces advanced management, the excellent business culture of Shanxi merchants and also shows the complicated relationships of social politics, economy and military affairs at the time.

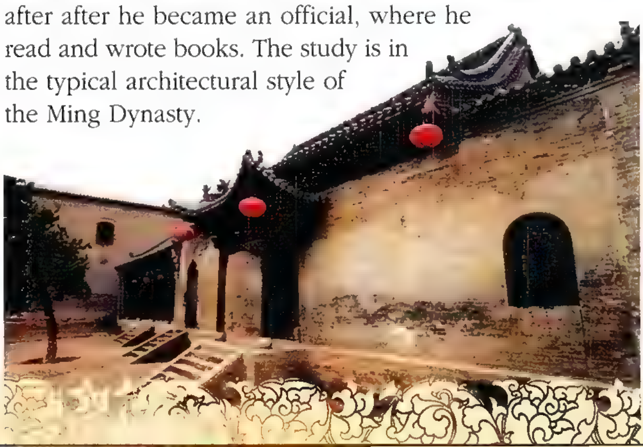


Dacheng Temple

Located east of clear pavilion square, Dacheng temple was built in the Song Dynasty. Because Buddhism Tripitaka in Ming Dynasty were stored in the temple, the temple was named Dacheng or Mahayana Temple. The famous calligrapher Fu Shan, man of letters Gu Yanwu, and Wang Jieshi, used the temple to organise political activities to overturn the Qing Dynasty and restore the Ming. The temple became very famous and a part of history. It played an important role in religious culture, but also left a record in history.

Zhufu Study

Zhufu (AD 1533 - 1600) was born in Dongbai Village, Yuci. He was a successful candidate in the highest imperial examinations in 1565. He took the office of minister of revenue and junior guardian of the heir, experiencing the reigns of Jiajing, Longqing and Wanli. In his 36 years of office, he also wrote many books, such as "Record of My Service", "Record of My Service II", and "Yuci County Annals" (Wanli Version) and others. Located at the south end of East Sreet, Zhufu Study is where Zhu Fu worked after after he became an official, where he read and wrote books. The study is in the typical architectural style of the Ming Dynasty.



Confucius Temple

Located in the north of Longwangmiao street, Confucius Temple is one of the oldest buildings in Yuci and is an important cultural relic protection site.

In the Tang Dynasty, the emperor ordained the establishment of Confucius Temples in all states and counties. In AD 999, Gong Fu, county magistrate of Yuci, took charge of building the Confucius Temple. The temple was repaired many times in the dynasties following the Song Dynasty. Currently, it occupies 18,000 m^2 with a construction area of 5,000 m^2. There are lots of Confucian buildings such as Lattice Star Gate, Halberd Gate, School Pond, Hall of Great Achievements, Warehouse, Mencius' Mother Temple and Hall of Enlightened Rule.

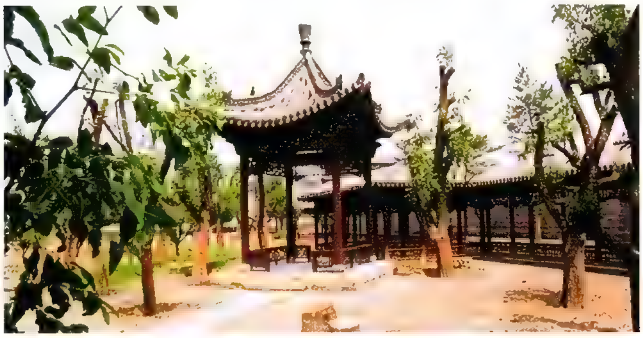
Folk Hostel

Clusters of big red lanterns and lanes of houses give the old city an ancient feel.

Folk hostel is unique, with a strong atmosphere of homely folk culture. Here you can listen to spring rain at night and buy apricots and flowers in the morning. After a sound sleep for the night, you wake up in the morning, open the wooden window, take a cup of green tea, forget the chaos in your life, and enjoy the quiet.

East Garden

The East Garden is located west of the Temple of Town God and occupies 4,800 m^2. There are no complicated architectural structures in the garden, just simple corridors and flower stands, and dozens of Chinese jujube trees. But it is a real representation of a jujube village. In autumn, visitors can pick jujube in the garden and taste the fruit from the old jujube trees.



Fengming School

Built in 1748, located in the north of Longwangmiao and west of Confucius Temple, the Fengming School occupies 8,000 m^2. Fengming School is a private free school from the Qing Dynasty. It was said that some phoenixes gathered in Yuci City in the Western Jin Dynasty, giving the school its name. In Fengming School, you can see dense and shady trees and small waves in the pool.

Jintong Cotton Shop

Established in 1932, located in the east of the middle section of Fuhu Street, Jintong Flower Shop is a two-story quadrangle with a western style shop front. To monopolise the cotton market, Yan Xishan, a Shanxi warlord, established the shop in the Republican period.

Currently, Jintong Cotton Shop is a folk treasure showroom of Chinese folk culture and an arts museum. It displays the unique charm of folk arts in a modern venue.

Scenes of the Old City

Yiyuan Garden

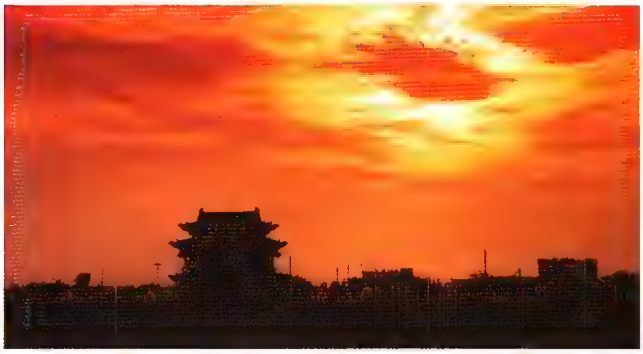
The buildings in the Yiyuan Garden are small and exquisite, with piled stones and pond, ingenious corridors and a pavilion of the South river China style. It makes for a very comfortable place to relax for visitors.

Night Scenes of the Market Building

When night is coming, the Market Building and Recalling Phoenix Building shine under the lights, looking splendid and glorious. The ancient building is reflected in the water, creating another special scene.

Snow Scenes of the Western Garden

After snow, the Western Garden is covered in a beautiful white blanket. The small Plum Hill looks like a fine jade carving; the pines show some green sprouts from branches, looking like green jade. The simple architecture and white background create a holy atmosphere that gives a different and fresh spiritual experience for visitors.



Setting Sun of Dragon Gate

Setting Sun of Dragon Gate was always a famous scenic spot of Yuci. Zhu Fu, Minister of Revenue in the Song Dynasty, described the setting sun here in his poem Setting Sun of Dragon Gate.

Surrounding Scenic Spots

To meet the demands of the many visitors interested in the Shanxi merchants culture, a Shanxi merchants travel route has been developed. Yuci is the starting point of the tour.

The old Yuci downtown is one of the biggest Shanxi merchants' theme attractions. You will learn about the rich Shanxi merchants' culture here. Walking to the south, you come to the second site, the "Yuci Chang's Manor", to find out about the No.1 family of Confucian merchants in China. Farther to the south is Qiao's Courtyard in Qixian County, Pingyao Ancient City, Mianshan Mountain of Jiexiu City and Wang's Courtyard in Lingshi. This tour is a perfect way to learn about the Shanxi merchants' culture.

Wang's Courtyard

Located in Jingsheng Town, which is 12 km east of Lingshi County, Jinzhong, Shanxi, Wang's Courtyard is the outstanding representative of residential buildings of the Qing Dynasty, with a total area of 150,000 m^2. The three construction clusters of Gaojia Cliff, Hongmen Fort and Xiaoyi Ancestral Temple, all built in the Qing Dynasty, are open to the public, totaling 45,000 m^2 and 1,118 rooms. Wang's Courtyard inherited the courtyard style with a hall in front and bedrooms at the back, a style formed in the West Zhou Dynasty. The brick carving, wood carving and stone carving are of high craftsmanship, elegant decoration, a mixture of southern and northern. In 2002, it was ranked as a national AAAA level scenic spot.

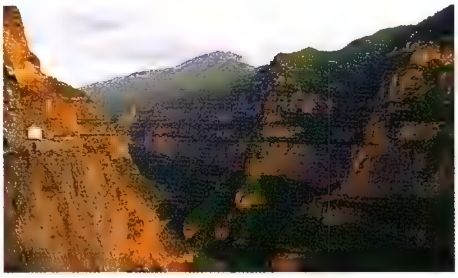
Jinci Ancestral Temple

Jinci Ancestral Temple is located at the source of the Jinshui River, at the foot of Xuanweng Hill, 25 km southwest of Taiyuan, Shanxi. The temple is surrounded by mountains, water, and forests. It is composed of about 100 palaces, halls, buildings, pavilions, platforms and bridges with twisting trees and zigzagging springs. Jinci Temple is a garden with a long history and rich in cultural relics. It is an important example of ancient forest buildings and coloured statue art. In 1961, it was listed as an important national cultural relic protection site by the State Council. In 2000, it was ranked as scenic spot of the first national AAAA level by the National Tourism Administration.

Jiexiu Mianshan Mountain

Located 20 km southeast of Jiexiu City, Shanxi province, the mountain is famous for this story: in the Spring and Autumn Period, grand master Jie Zitui of Jin state resigned from his office. He lived in seclusion with his mother and finally burned himself and his mother after refusing the appointment of the new emperor. The folk custom "Cold Food Festival" is set up in memory of Jie Zitui.

Mianshan Mountain is high, with dense forest, rapid waterfalls and vast clouds. In the Northern Wei Dynasty, temples were built on the mountain by both Buddhists and Taoists. It is said that Baofu Temple under Baofu Cliff is the place where Tian Zhichao, so-called "Void King Buddha", practiced Buddhism. In 1996, Yan Jiying, an entrepreneur in Jiexiu, invested RMB 500 million to develop Mianshan Mountain. After repairing many scenic spots, hotels and the spiraling mountain road, a vacation resort was completed, featuring six scenic spots including Water Wave Ditch (Shuitao Ditch), Saints Valley (Qixian Valley), and Dragon Ridge Moutain (Longji Mountain). They combine history, culture, religion, ancient architecture and natural scenery.



Dazhai

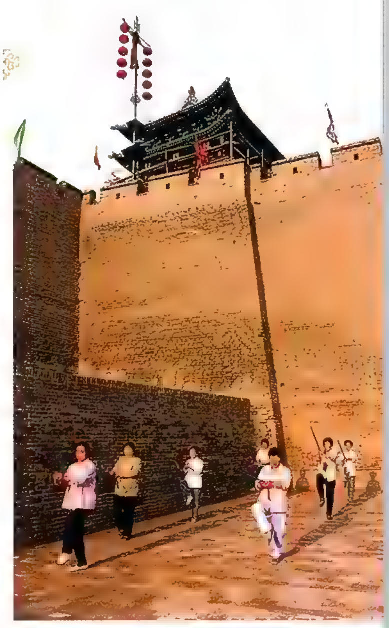
In the 1960s and 1970s, with the spirit of self-dependence and hard work, Dazhai people created miracles of agricultural production, making a name for themselves at home and abroad. Many Party and government leaders, and people from all over the world visited the place. Now, Dazhai is still a good place for a visit.

Chang's Manor

Located in Dongyang Town, Yuci District, Jinzhong, Shanxi, Chang's Manor is the residence complex of the Chang family, a well-known family of foreign traders of the Qing Dynasty. Currently, the residence and garden have been repaired and opened to the public, occupying 120,000 m^2, including one hill, an attic, two pavilions, three courtyards, four gardens, eight auxiliary buildings, eight halls, 25 corridors, and 27 courtyards. The complex houses the largest folk ancestral temple and the largest family study in China, with a rich collection of paintings and calligraphy. A great number of architectural carvings carry poems and proverbs, and portray plums, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemum, chess and calligraphy. Paintings show the Confucian merchants of the Chang family. It is a good place to learn about Chinese culture.

Pingyao Ancient City

Pingyao is a national historic and cultural city with a history of 2,700 years. It is located southwest of Jinzhong, Shanxi, and about 80 km from Taiyuan City. The ancient city covers 2.25 km^2. The four main streets, eight smaller streets and 72 lanes are well planned. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Shanxi merchants established a great number of large private shops, making the old city a busy commercial centre. On December 3, 1997, Pinyao Ancient City, Shuanglin Temple and Zhenguo Temple were certified as World Cultural Heritage sites by the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO.

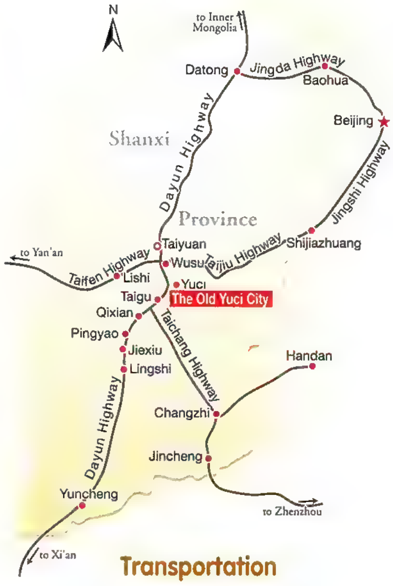


The Qiao's Courtyard

Located in Qiaojiabao Village, Qixian County, Jinzhong, Shanxi, Qiao's courtyard is about 50 km from Taiyuan. It was the residence of Qiao Zhiyong, a merchant of the Qing Dynasty. It was built in AD 1755, occupying 10,642 m^2. It is made up of six courtyards, 20 small courtyards and 313 rooms. The layout of the whole courtyard is like the Chinese character for "double happiness".

From a distance, you can see that the courtyard is well designed, and when you walk in, the beauty, elegance, simplicity and quietness are obvious. It is the crystallisation of high architecture art and the intelligence of the ancient Chinese, reputed as a brilliant pearl of north residential building in the Qing Dynasty. It is said that the Imperial Palace is representative of the imperial family and the Qiao's Courtyard is representative of the best civil houses. It was here that the movie "Raise the Red Lantern" was filmed. It was ranked a national AAAA level scenic spot in 2002.

Travel Tips



Transportation

Located in the centre of Yuci District, Jinzhong, Shanxi, Yuci City is 16 km from Wusu airport in Taiyuan City. It is 25 km from downtown Taiyuan and 487 km from Beijing.

By Air

Arriving at Wusu airport in Taiyuan, you can get a 15-minute taxi ride to Yuci city. Currently, flights to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Hong Kong are available.

Highway

From Taiyuan

From the train station, you can take Bus No. 901 and get off at the last stop; if you drive your own car, you should drive along Yutai road to downtown Yuci city.

From Datong - Shuozhou and Wutai Mountain

From Yuantai highway to Taiyuan-Shangdong transit highway, take the Yuci exit of Wusu crossroads and then drive along Yutai road to downtown Yuci district.

From Beijing, Shijiazhuang, and Yanquan

From Taijiu (Shitai) highway to Taiyuan South Ring highway, take the Jinzhong exit, and then drive along Yutai road to downtown Yuci district.

From Xi'an, Yuncheng and Linfen

From Dayun highway to Taiyuan South Ring highway, get off at the Jinzhong exit, and then drive along Yutai road to downtown Yuci district.

Railway

Visitors who get off at Taiyuan train station can get to Yuci City following the Taiyuan traffic guide; visitors who get off at Yuci station can get a five-minute taxi ride to Yuci City.

Accommodation

Hotels in Jinzhong City

Yijing International Hotel

Address: No.71 Xishuncheng Street, Yuci District, Jinzhong, Shanxi

Tel: (354) 208-8888 Post Code: 030600

Jinrong Hotel

Address: No. 71 Daobei Street, Yuci District, Jinzhong, Shanxi

Tel: (354) 311-1888 Post Code: 030600

Jinhuayuan Hotel

Address: No.99 Yingbin Road, Yuci District, Jinzhong, Shanxi

Tel: (354) 306-6988 Post Code: 030600

Hotels in Taiyuan

Jingang Hotel

Address: No.91 Bingzhoubei Road, Taiyuan, Shanxi

Tel: (351) 472-8888

Shanxi Hotel

Address: No.5 Xinjianan Road, Taiyuan, Shanxi

Tel: (351) 882-9999

Shanxi Yingze Hotel

Address: No.189 Yingze Street, Taiyuan, Shanxi

Tel: (351) 882-8888

Travel Guide

Religion and Ancient Architecture Tour

A Route: Yungang Grottoes in Datong — Hanging Temple in Hengshan— Wooden Tower in Yingxian— Buddhism Mecca — Wutai Mountain — Yuci City

B Route: Yungang Grottoes in Datong — Buddhism Mecca — Wutai Mountain — Taiyuan Jinci Temple — Yuci Old City

Culture Tour

A Route: Taiyuan Jinci Temple — Yuci Old City-Qiao's Courtyard — Pinyao Ancient City — Jiexiu Mianshan Mountain — Wang's Courtyard

B Route: Yuci Old City — Yuci Chang's Manor — Pinyao Ancient City — Jiexiu Mianshan Mountain

Root-Seeking Tour

A Route: Jinci Temple in Taiyuan — Yuci Old City — Ancient Big Pagoda Tree — First emperor Yao's Temple in Linfen — Temple of Guan Yu in Yuncheng — Yongle Palace in Ruicheng

B Route: Yuci Old City — Ancient Big Pagoda Tree — First Emperor Yao's Temple in Linfen — Hukou Waterfall

Weekend Leisure Culture Tour

A Route: Jinci Temple in Taiyuan — Yuci Old City — Jiexiu Mianshan Mountain

B Route: Yuci Old City — Chang's Courtyard in Yuci

Selected Route Tour of Shanxi

Yungang Grottoes in Datong — Hanging Temple in Hengshan — Buddhism Mecca-Wutai Mountain — Jinci Temple in Taiyuan — Yuci Old City — Jiexiu Mianshan Mountain — Pinyao Ancient City-Wang's Courtyard — Ancient Big Pagoda Tree — Temple of Guan Yu in Yuncheng (six-day tour)

The Street that "Meows"

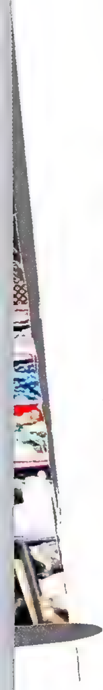
The Bric-a-Brac Paradise of Cat Street

Photos & Article by Maggie Lam

What separates Hong Kong from other regions is that one can easily find bits and pieces of its maritime past amidst the heart of the city. Take Upper Lascar Row Street (also known as Cat Street) for an instance. Located near the financial hub of Central, the historic buildings around that area remind us of its wild days.

Cat and Mouse

Upper Lascar Row Street used to be a popular haunt for robbers and thieves just several decades ago, and the area was packed with brothels and seamen's lodgings. Despite its notorious reputation, many people would come here to buy lost or stolen goods.



The Cantonese dialect calls thieves "rats" and underground dealers "cats", hence the nickname "Cat Street". Nowadays these unlawful dealers have mostly vanished, and the streets are lined with shops and stalls selling bric-a-brac and handicrafts. To some, it is just another flea market, but others, it is an excellent hunting ground for ornaments with a unique oriental twist. Here you can find the most delightful collections of knick-knacks, real and fake antiques, as well as all sorts of useful and useless treasures.

But be forewarned! Don't let all these glittering gems get over your head: this is a place to show off your bargaining skills!

Follow the Ladder

Cat Street lies in the Sheung Wan district, which is the part of Hong Kong that built on a mountainside; some says the place is even hillier than San Francisco.

An interesting route to visit Cat Street is to follow the Ladder Street. This street is about 70 m long and askew down very steep slope from Queen's Road all the way to Caine Road. As if climbing the "ladder" is not amusing enough, the street offers some of Hong Kong's oldest houses with detailed engravings and wooden balconies. The middle of the "ladder" intersects with Cat Street, where it is sandwiched between Hollywood Road and Lok Ku Road.

High Class Kittens

Since the eminent street draws in throngs of curio collectors, a number of fancy art and antique shops seize the opportunity and sprout on the nearby Hollywood Road and Lok Ku Road. They offer high-priced merchandises that ranged from various dynasties, which adds a bonus for those who long for an antiques shopping odyssey.

Man Mo Temple

Last but not least, the neighbourhood has another surprise for you. Situated west of Hollywood Road and at the corner of Ladder Street, the humble Man Mo Temple is Hong Kong's oldest sanctuary.

"Man" is the god of civil servants and of literature, while "Mo" is the martial arts and war god. Built in 1840s, this popular temple is regularly filled with worshippers. There are statues of the legendary Eight Immortals guarding outside the temple, with two brass deer adorning the main chamber. Once inside, you may find many oversize incense spirals dangled from the ceiling, and they can burn for weeks. The temple is open daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., and you are more than welcome to bring your incense and pray for blessings.

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1. Here on "Cat Street", you can find the most delightful collections of knick-knacks, real and fake antiques, as well as all sorts of useful and useless treasures.
2. This is one of the most fasinating flea markets in Hong Kong.
3. The humble Man Mo Temple is Hong Kong's oldest sanctuary.
4. President Mao's little red books
5. These oversize incense spirals can burn for weeks.
6. Cat street is lined with shops and stalls selling bric-a-brac and handicrafts.
7. Ornaments with a unique oriental twist
8. Man Mo temple is open daily from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., and you are more than welcome to bring your incense and pray for blessings.

BITS AND PIECES ABOUT INNER MONGOLIA

In Hulunbuir, temperature stays below zero for seven months, but other parts of Inner Mongolia like Hohhot and Baotou have much more friendly climate and would be better places to start your expedition of the "kingdom of grassland".

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS AROUND HOHHOT

Hohhot, the capital city of Inner Mongolia, is located about 400 km west of Beijing. It is at an altitude of 1,500 m above sea level and is known mostly as a stopping point for travellers heading towards the grasslands that are located 80 to 170 km from the city.

Hohhot used to be a popular resting spot for Mongol nomads in the old days. The city itself was officially established in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), growing largely due to its religious buildings, and came to be called the City of Temples and Lamaseries. The Nationalist government referred to the city as Guisui at the turn of last century, but with the Communist succession in 1950, it was being known either literally as the Blue City (Qingcheng) or phonetically as Hohhot.

Zhaojun Tomb

Located near the bank of Da Hei River, 9 km to the south of Hohhot, Zhaojun Tomb is one of the most beautiful scenes of ancient times in Inner Mongolia.

Wang Zhaojun, a beautiful lady of Han nationality, was elected to enter the imperial palace during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 24). In the year 33 BC, Zhaojun was married of her own free will to an emperor of a small ethnic country Xiongnu, in exchange for friendly relationship among Xiongnu and Han. Zhaojun's sacrifice was worthwhile as in the following 60 years, no wars broke out among the two countries and people lived a better life.

The tomb, occupying an area of 1.3 ha, was built to commemorate Wang Zhaojun's contribution in spreading Chinese culture to the grassland. It was said that each year when the weather turned cold and grasses became yellow, the tomb remained green and therefore got the name Green Tomb (Qing Zhong).

Five Pagoda Temples

Five Pagoda Temple, also called Jingangzuo Sheli Baota, is seated in Wuta Temple at the southeastern part of the old town.

The 52-ft tall temple is decorated with glazed tiles. The lower part has many designs related to Buddhism and Jingang Scripture written in Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chinese. More than one thousand small but exquisite gold-plated figures of the Buddha are molded in upper tiers.

The most valuable stonecutting is the one carved on the northern wall. It is the only astronomical map annotated in Mongolian ever discovered in the world.

Xilamuren Grasslands

Xilamuren, meaning "yellow river" in Mongolian, is located 100 km north of Hohhot. Xilamuren Prairie, commonly known as Taihe, got its name from the Puhui Temple, a Lama temple built in the Qing Dynasty near the Xilamuren River. Constructed in 1769 during the reign of Emperor Qianlong, Puhui Temple was initially a resort of the Sixth Panchen Lama of Xilitu of Hohhot. With engraved beams and pictured purlins, the temple appears quite splendid.

Xilamuren Prairie, a typical example on the plateau, is covered by green grass and fresh flowers every summer and autumn. Due to the continual investment of the local government, reception service is growing better and better. At the grassland, you can enjoy an overnight stay at a traditional Mongolian Yurt.

Gegentala Grassland

Gegentala Prairie, in Mongolian means "a resort from heat". It is situated to the north of Mt. Daqing, 138 km away from Hohhot. You will truly be astonished by the remarkable beauty of natural scenery here.

At the prairie, you can have a good time horseback riding or experiencing a pleasure trip on a camel. At night, tourists can gather around a bonfire and listen to folk songs and watch folk dances. The best time to visit the grassland is definitely during the traditional Mongolian Nadam Festival period when activities such as Mongolian wrestling, horse and camel riding, rodeo competitions would be held.

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS AROUND BAOTOU

Baotou, a large industrial city in the remote regions of western Inner Mongolia, is a place that is visited by people who are deeply interested in the grassland culture.

The area where Baotou now lies was once a fairly arid grassland that was populated by Mongolian nomads and grazers. Just to the north of the both the Yellow River and the Gobi Desert, the city was established in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD). It was named "a land with deer" (Baotou) as hundreds of these creatures used to be found here.

Genghis Khan's Mausoleum

Genghis Khan, "Khan of Khans", was the greatest Mongolian leader. At the end of 12th century, he united Mongolian tribes and challenged other powers to expand his huge Mongolian empire, extending from South China to the Caspian Sea in 1277.

Genghis Khan died of disease and age. The great emperor was later buried secretly according to Mongolian custom. It says that after the burial 2,000 men were slaughtered by some 800 soldiers who were in turn executed so that the location of the real tomb remains a secret.

Genghis Khan's Mausoleum, 185 km south of Baotou, was rebuilt in 1954. Only his clothing was buried in memory of the great leader. The 5.5 ha mausoleum includes three giant yurt halls which house coffins of the Khan, his wife, his son and his generals.

There are four sacrifice ceremonies held annually to commemorate the great hero and leader of the Mongolian people. The ceremony, held on March 21st on lunar calendar, is the grandest. After the ceremony, horse racing, archery and wrestling would be held as entertainment.

Wudangzhao Lamasery

The Wudangzhao Lamasery is the biggest tourist attraction near Baotou, and thus is often flooded with both Chinese and foreign tourists. The Lamasery itself is of traditional, pretty Tibetan architecture, with white walls and flattened roofs, and was allegedly modelled after its distant Tibetan cousin, the Tashilunpo Monastery in Shigatse.

Located 70 km to the northeast of Baotou, the 250-year-old Lamasery is the largest of its kind in western Inner Mongolia. The style of Buddhism practiced here is of the Yellow Hat Sect (Gelukpa), which has a strong following in Mongolia ever since the Mongols invaded Tibet in the thirteenth century. The Lamasery is named Wudangzhao, literally Willow Lamasery in Mongolian, because the area has long been covered by wispy trees.

In its prime time, Wudangzhao had over 1,200 resident monks. The complex was built in 1749, and has been home to a number of "Living Buddhas", seven of whose ashes have been deposited in one of the main halls. In total the place has six main halls, the Sugabi Prayer Hall being the most elaborate. There are also a large collection of Buddhist art in the lamasery, ranging from ancient sculptures to murals of gold, silver, copper, wood and even soil.

FEB/MAR

now till Feb 15

Shenyang Ice and Snow Festival

Venue: Qipan Mountain in Shenyang, Liaoning Province

What's on: Snowcapped Qipan Mountain, picturesque at any time of the year, is perfect for winter sports. Co-presented with the government of Sapporo in Japan, the festival will offer international snow sculpture contest, mass Alpine skiing tournament, ice and snow products fair, Miss Ice and Snow Pageant, winter swimming contest, photography contest and so on.

now till Feb 28

Taipei Lantern Festival

Venue: Taipei City, Taiwan

What's On: The festival, which will be held at Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, is the most exciting event of the year. Besides the display of the Lantern of the Year, Jen-ai Road will be turned into a "lantern hallway".

Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall

Feb 17 ~ Mar 20

Procession of the Passion of Jesus

Venue: Macao

What's On: A unique Macao religious celebration where image of Christ carrying the Cross will be taken in solemn procession from St. Augustine's Church to the Cathedral for an overnight vigil. It is then returned, accompanied by a magenta-robed escort and crowds of the faithful and curious.

The Cathedral

Feb 16 ~ 25

The Great Prayer Festival (Monlam)

Venue: Lhasa city, Tibet

What's On: The image of Maitreya (the future Buddha) will be carried from Jokhang Temple around Barkhor Square. Monks from the Three Great Monasteries will gather in Lhasa to debate philosophical questions.

Nanjing City

Feb 26 ~ Mar 18

Nanjing International Plum Blossom Festival

Venue: Plum Blossom Garden in Bell Mountain Scenic Area, Nanjing City

What's On: The Plum Blossom Garden is one of the four plum gardens in China and has the highest acclaim among the country. There are various cultural tours and carnivals held during the festival.

Mar 28 ~ April 28

Taohuayuan Garden Fair

Venue: Taohuayuan, Changde City, Hunan Province

What's On: Taohuayuan (Peach Blossom Paradise) is located 15 km away from Taoyuan County, Changde City. This area was well-known to Chinese as the famous Chinese poet Tao Yuanming wrote about it during the Jin Dynasty. During the fair, visitors can enjoy the full blossom of peach trees and also the special cultural performance being held.

Feb 17 ~ Mar 20

Hong Kong Arts Festival

Venue: Hong Kong

What's On: Praised as the most important arts event in Hong Kong, the festival will feature renowned overseas and local artists to participate in an array of music, theatre, dance and popular entertainment programmes. Highlights include the complete Beethoven Symphonies conducted by Frans Bruggen, works by Nederlands Dans Theatre, and Jiangsu Kunqu Opera of "The Palace of Eternal Youth".

CHINA TOURISM
THE SILVER
HULUNBUIR
295

Readership Survey

China Tourism always appreciates feedback from its readers. In accordance with your suggestions, we have recently added a variety of new columns. Still, we need to know more of your opinions, including criticisms and suggestions. Please take a couple of minutes to complete this questionnaire and return it to us. Thank you!

Please give your evaluation of the stories in this issue and your overall impression of *China Tourism*.

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
The Silver Hulunbuir	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My Fisherman's Life at Erhai Lake	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In Search of Takins	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gedu Festival of Shangri-La	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Old Yuci City	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Others:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Photographs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cover	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Articles	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Travel Tips	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Art Design	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Other Opinions: ____________________

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Are you happy with the factual content of *China Tourism*? ☐ Yes ☐ No

What are your suggestions for improvement?

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Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. It provides us with invaluable feedback which will help us improve *China Tourism* magazine for you.

*Please mail this questionnaire to our office at 24/F, Westlands Centre, 20 Westlands Road, Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, or fax to (852) 2561 8196.

HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUE NO. 296

Feature Story: Mt. Huangshan in Winter

Located in southern Anhui Province, Mount Huangshan forms a famous scenic spot in China honoured as a national treasure and a wonder in the world. In 1990, UNESCO listed it as a world natural and cultural heritage site. Its landscape features "four wonders" of imposing peaks, spectacular rocks, odd-shaped pines, and a sea of clouds.

The mountain boasts 77 peaks over 1,000 m high, with three main peaks rising majestically, namely the Lotus Peak, followed by the Peak of Celestial City and the Peak of Brightness, all above 1,800 m. The cliffs, stone forests, stone pillars and egg-shaped stones form the unique granite geomorphological scenery. The pines on the mountain are tall and have fascinating shapes. Last but not least, more than 200 days each year on Mount Huangshan are misty and cloudy. The vapours coagulate to form a sea of clouds. As the clouds cloak the mountain, they give a feeling of being in fairyland.

Profile:

Driving for Love

At the age of 65, Mr. Gao or Old Gao as he is called, decided to learn how to ride the motorbike, just to keep his marriage alive. In four years, he covered 140,000 km and took quite a few thousand pictures.

City Snap:

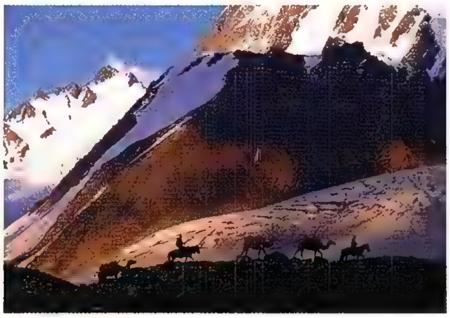
Dancing with the Ocean — Qingdao

Many of my friends who have been to Qingdao would inexorably lament: "If only I could live in Qingdao..." Indeed, I can visualise Qingdao as an ideal place to reside. On one hand, its rugged and winding streets, flanked with rows of historic red-tiled houses and beautiful greenery, offer a breathtaking sight; on the other hand, its thriving industrial development and rapid growth of tourism offer many jobs — which basically sums up the desires of every city dweller.

Highlights:

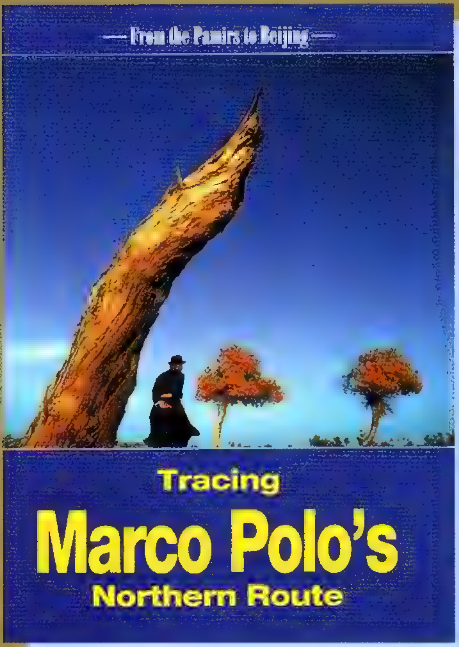
A Tourist Guide to Urumqi

Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, is the centre of politics, economy, culture and transportation of Xinjiang, one of the key towns of the north section of the Silk Roads and also the window of China's opening to the west and the western China's "bridgehead" of the Eurasia Bridge. The city mixes about thirty nationalities and has a population of 2.15 million.



Photographic & Practical Guides
for Your China Tours

Before you set off for your perfect journey, you may have to prepare your itinerary carefully. Each of the following recommended readings offers different types of information which cater to our readers' various interests: exploring photography, or tourist information. They will be great guides to your China tours.


From the Pamirs to Beijing
Tracing
Marco Polo's
Northern Route

Tracing Marco Polo's Northern Route

A record of an 80-day journey in which our authors drive their jeep 12,000 km long through the northern regions of China following in the footsteps of Macro Polo's historic journey from the Pamir Highland to Beijing. In a medley of images and words, we present you with the fascinating scenery and various ways of life in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet.

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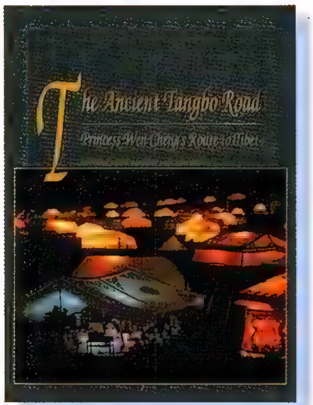

The Ancient Tangbo Road
Princess Wen Cheng's Route to Tibet

The Ancient Tangbo Road

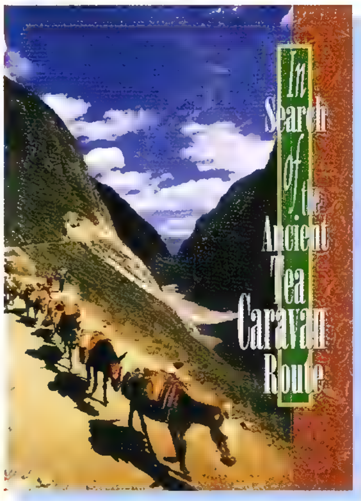
Covering four provinces including Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and the Tibet Autonomous Region, the ancient Tangbo Road was created on the map when Princess Wen Cheng was sent as a bride to Luoxie (present-day Lhasa) during the Tang Dynasty. Our photographers and writers, who have followed this arduous route, present you the graceful sights and unique ethnic customs on the way.

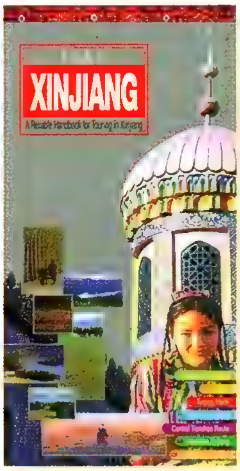
HK$192

In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route

The ancient Tea Caravan Route can be traced back to 2,000 years ago, starting from Xishuangbanna at China's southwestern end, passing through boundless forests and valleys to the Sino-Indian, Nepalese and Sikkimese borders on Tibet, the "Roof of the World". This book is not-to-be-missed by every daring adventurer.

HK$192


In Search of the Ancient Tea Caravan Route


XINJIANG
A Reliable Handbook for Touring in Xinjiang

Guide to Xinjiang

This book is especially designated for DIY travellers who desire to explore the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. There are detailed introduction to scenic spots in five main areas in Xinjiang including Urümqi, Turpan, Southern and Northern Xinjiang, and Central Tianshan. Practical tourist information on accommodation, ticketing, shopping, local specialty, as well as travel tips are covered.

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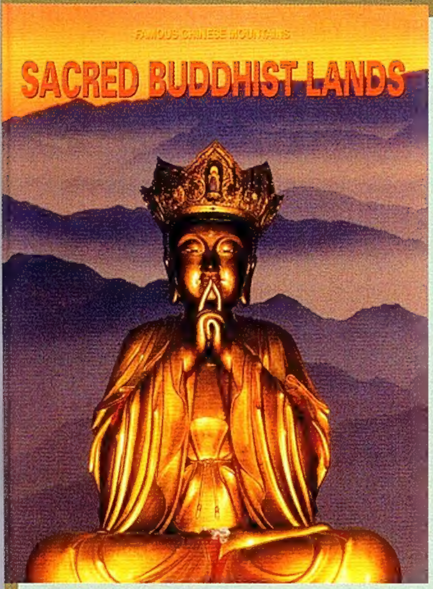

Sacred Buddhist Lands

Buddhism in China is inevitably linked with some of the country's best known mountains. And going deep in the mountains and far away from civilization is an ideal place for retreat. Belonging to the four Bodhisattvas respectively, the four most famous Buddhist mountains — Wutai, Jiuhua, Putuo and Emei — are nestled with numerous monasteries and nunneries which have been worshipped by pilgrims for thousands of years. Tourists to these places will totally be soaked in "Kingdoms of Buddhism".

HK$156

The Five Sacred Mountains
The Yellow Mountain

Located in five provinces in China, every of the Five Sacred Mountains — Taishan, Hengshan, Songshan, Hengshan and Huashan — has its magnificent natural and cultural landscapes. Besides, Huangshan (Yellow Mountain), is also famous for its spectacular rocks, pine trees, and sea of clouds. It will be a great enjoyment in reading both the detailed text and remarkable images by our experienced photographers as recorded in this book.

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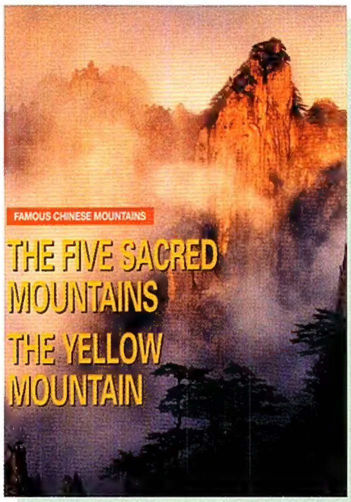

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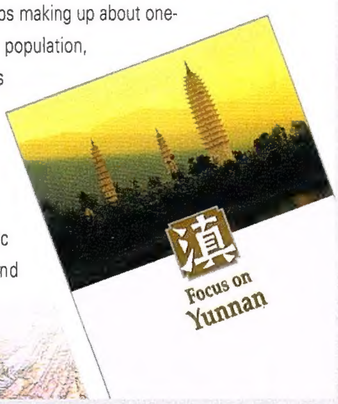
Focus on Yunnan

The mountainous wonderland of Yunnan enjoys a favourable warm climate year round. Its capital, Kunming, sitting alongside Yunnan's largest lake, Dianchi, has the honourable name of "Spring City". The province is full of natural wonders and cultural relics, such as the Stone Forests, the Shangri-La, and the ancient cities of Dali and Lijiang. With over 20 diverse ethnic groups making up about one-third of the population, opportunities abound for you to see their characteristic cultures and customs.



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Focus on Fujian

Situated on the southeast coast, Fujian Province overlooks Taiwan Island across the Taiwan Strait. Its mountainous landscape includes the Wuyi Mountain Scenic Area, one of the UN World Heritage sites in China. The province's zigzag coastlines, numerous beaches and charming seas offer spectacular scenic beauty as well as historical and cultural interest in such places as the Drumming Wave Islet in Xiamen and the Mazu Temple in Meizhou Island.

閩
Focus on
Fujian

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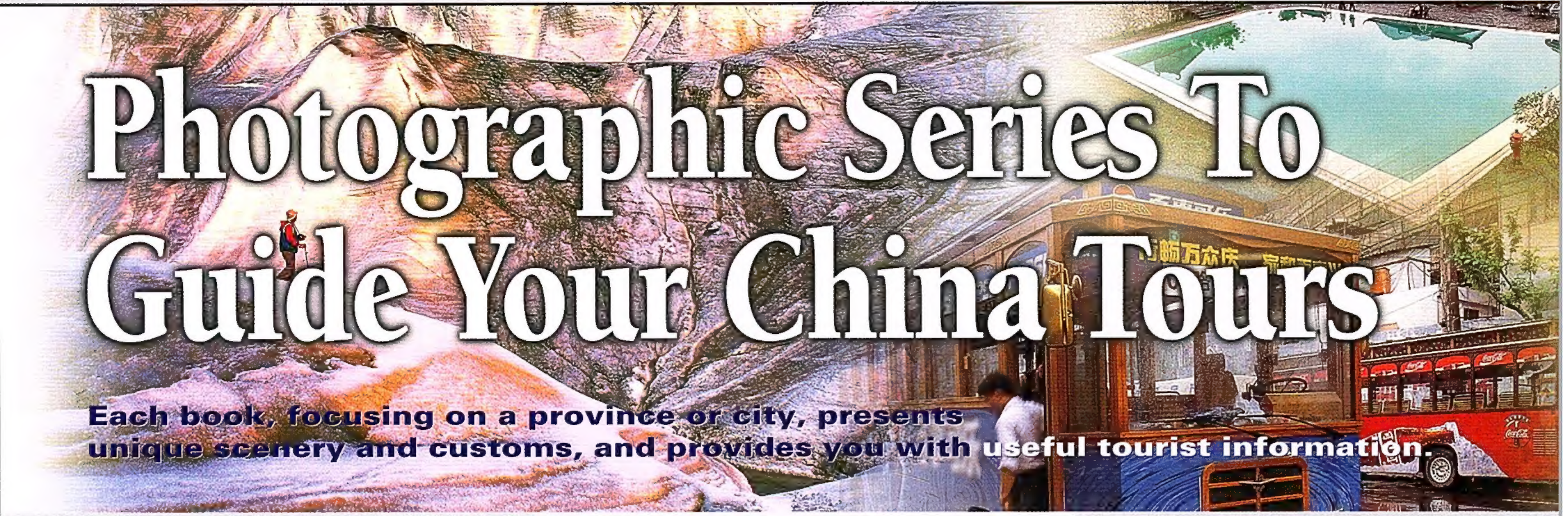
Focus on Shanghai

Shanghai, the largest metropolis in China, and formerly the Far East financial centre, has experienced dramatic development over the past century. The world-famous Bund along the Huangpu River shows you buildings of different historical periods and varied architectural styles, while skyscrapers are rising in the new area of Pudong. Shanghai's multiculturism is seen in its music — operas, nostalgic jazz and discos — and in the busy commercial district of Nanjing and Huaihai roads.

滬
Focus on
Shanghai



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Each book, focusing on a province or city, presents unique scenery and customs, and provides you with useful tourist information.

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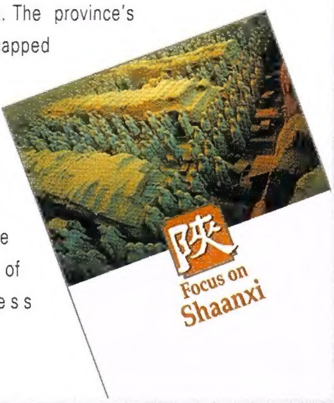
Focus on Shaanxi

Shaanxi is the cradle of the Chinese civilisation and Xi'an was the capital of 13 dynasties. This has left Shaanxi a rich legacy of historical sites and cultural relics. In the provincial capital Xi'an, there is the fascinating terracotta army unearthed from the tomb of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuang; the tomb of Tang-dynasty Wu Zetian, China's first empress; and the stele forest. The province's beauty is capped with the sheer cliffs of Mount Huashan and the yellow earth of the Loess Plateau.



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Focus on Guangdong

An important gateway into China, the fertile Pearl River Delta of the southern province of Guangdong fans out from Guangzhou to the South China Sea and borders Hong Kong and Macao. The province's natural scenic spots include the limestone pinnacles of Zhaoqing's Seven Star Crags, the red sandstone of Danxia Mountain, and the volcanic beauty of Xiqiao Mountain. The capital, Guangzhou, offers plenty of history in its museums, temples, mosques and old colonial buildings.

粵
Focus on
Guangdong

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Focus on Guizhou

Guizhou is a land of splendid natural scenery. Its towering mountains and karst landforms team up with the gurgling rivers and magnificent waterfalls to form a wonderful work of Mother Nature. Huangguoshu Waterfalls and the limestone caves are the province's most frequented scenic spots. The 17 ethnic groups living in the picturesque province further colour the land with vivid customs and joyous festivals. It is its natural beauty and culture that make Guizhou a perfect travel destination.

黔
Focus on
Guizhou

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Focus on Tianjin

Tianjin, one of the four municipalities under direct Central Government administration, is an important industrial and commercial centre of China and the biggest port in the north. The history of the city can be found in its Ancient Culture Street, 100-year-old Western-style buildings, Opera Museum and Mazu Temple. Besides the TV Tower and the Haihe River in the city, there are scenic spots in the outskirts, including the Dule Temple and the Great Wall at Huangya Pass.

津
Focus on
Tianjin

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Focus on Xinjiang

On the vast land of Xinjiang in Northwest China, there are mountains, basins, deserts and lakes, which provide tourists with numerous attractions — ruins of ancient cities and tombs along the Silk Road; Turpan, an oasis in the desert; Kanas Lake, a gem imbedded in the Altay Mountains; Bayanbulak — the Swan Lake; and the world's second largest desert, the Taklimakan. The minority ethnic groups living in Xinjiang, such as the Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Uzbek, Tajik, Xibe, Kirgiz and Tatar, all have their own unique colourful culture.

新
Focus on
Xinjiang

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Focus on Beijing

Beijing is a metropolis of everlasting charm. There are simply too many captivating things to see, to experience and to taste in this grand city with both old glamour and new mobility. There are historical sites such as the Palace Museum (the Forbidden City), the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs; there are also many scenic spots in its outskirts. Recently, tours have been organised for visitors to taste the real Beijing flavour of life — touring the small back lanes, having tea in a traditional-style teahouse and enjoying the Peking Opera.

京
Focus on
Beijing

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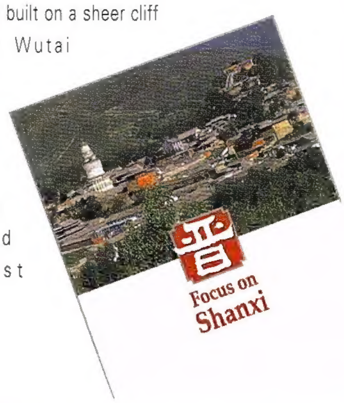
Focus on Shanxi

Shanxi Province, one of the birthplaces of the Chinese civilisation, has impressive ancient architecture and a wealth of well-preserved Buddhist temples, monasteries and grottoes. Among the most famous are the Yungang Grottoes containing some of China's oldest sculptures and Buddhist art, the Yongle Palace, the Jinci Temple, the Hanging Monastery built on a sheer cliff and the Wutai Mountain, one of China's most famous sacred Buddhist lands.



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Focus on Guangxi

Unusual topography has endowed the province with numerous spectacular karst formations — limestone caves, pinnacles and rocks. The most famous and enchanting scenic spot is Guilin, and the most travelled route, on the Lijiang River from Guilin to Yangshuo. The coastal city of Beihai has the country's largest beach, the Silver Beach. Other attractions include the varied traditional customs of ethnic minorities, the Sino-Vietnamese border area, and the mysterious Huashan cliff paintings.

桂
Focus on
Guangxi

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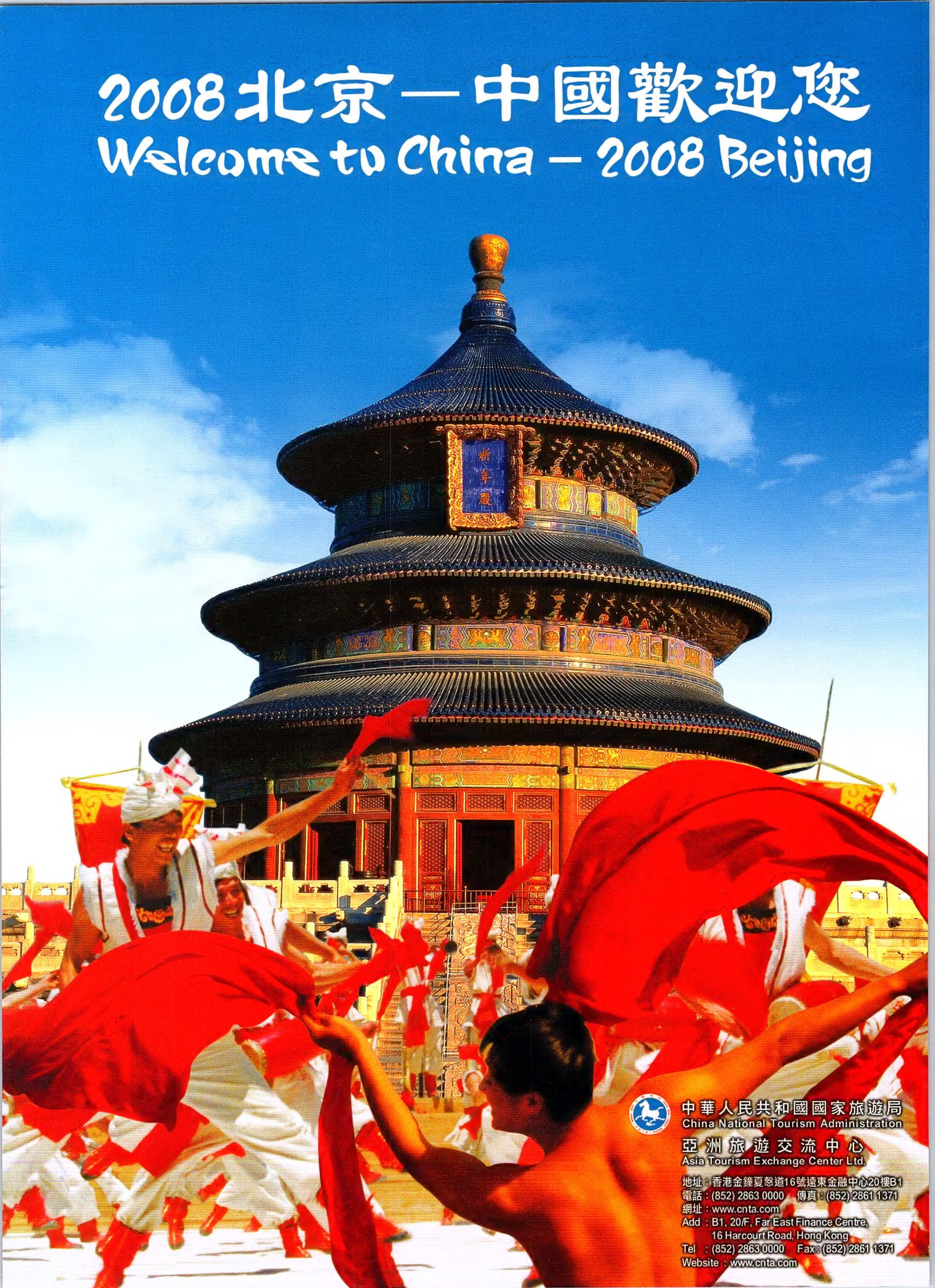
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